# TORTURE ISLAND

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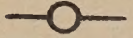

I·R·G·HART

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# CHAPTER I

## FALSE ESCAPE

THE night was windy, the sea sullen and heaving, but not yet rough. About three quarters of a moon shone intermittently through tattered, flying clouds, showing a lonely, barren coast and, flung from a headland, a trail of steep and rocky islets. On one of these there was a little cove, backed by precipitous cliffs, and hidden both from the open sea and from the land there lay, on the small patch of sand, a boat with three men standing about it.

"Near thing that," said one. "In a sea like this we might easily have missed him altogether. Take him into the back upstairs room and hang something over the window so that he can't see the cliff. If he shows signs of coming round be careful he doesn't recognise you. I'll get into my priest's kit and be with you in a minute. Castle, you must attend to him. Just warmth and stimulants. Get rugs from my bed. Keep the room dark and don't use anything he has seen before."

He ran ahead across the sand to where a half-ruined cottage stood close under the cliff and close above high-tide mark. The two men who remained behind stooped and lifted from the boat another who appeared to be quite unconscious.

"Curse the little brute," muttered one of them. "Gives trouble enough for ten."

"Well, what do you expect?" the other retorted; "if you were him, wouldn't you try to escape?"

"Damn him!" was the answer, spoken with unmistakable sincerity of feeling. "I can't stick his airs."

He went on growling as they walked towards the cottage. "Treating us all like dirt when he knows quite well—"

"Sh—" his companion interposed in a sharp, irritable whisper, "if he's conscious at all he'll recognise your voice—and your style."

The answer was a grunt—a grunt that might have been interpreted—"And you're no better—damn you!"

Ben Hay opened his eyes and stared in blank bewilderment. For the moment he had forgotten the immediate past. He was on a strange bed, in a strange room, with a strange man dressed as a priest bending over him.

"What has happened?" he whispered. "Who are you?—oh, Lord, I do feel bad!"

He looked about him. A single oil lamp, turned low and inclined to smoke at one corner, showed a damp-stained ceiling and four mildewed walls, a window roughly curtained with an old travelling rug, and the light wooden bed on which he was lying. The tall man beside him had his back to the light, so that his face was completely shadowed.

"But where am I?" he insisted; "and how did I get here?"

"Drink this first," said the priest kindly, speaking with a strong West of Ireland brogue. "You must not be talking yet, or I'd be asking you what you were doing in the sea at this time of night. It was Patsey O'Brien brought you here and sent for me."

It was a striking-looking creature that lay on the bed, between man and boy, long and slight and troubled. His features were sharply cut, clean and clear. There was nothing blurred or moulded about them, everywhere an edge, and a definite form. Handsome he should have been if line and proportion were enough to make him so, but his face wore a strained, sunken look that told of illness or privation, and his intensely dark eyes showed a strange uncertainty—a hint of fear.

"It's odd," he muttered; "odd. How did I get here? I don't understand. I seem to remember—"

"You'll be remembering things that never really happened," the priest interrupted soothingly. "It was Pat O'Brien, by good luck, saw you in the moonlight. Right in the path of the moon you were, he says. (Though what he was doing himself, unless he was up to no good, out alone at this time of night, I cannot imagine.) And he put out in his boat to save you, and brought you here to his cottage and sent for me. There is nothing need trouble you now."

The boy looked about him with haunted, doubtful eyes.

"And who are you?" he asked slowly; "and where am I?"

"I am Father Foley," was the answer, "and this is Pat O'Brien's cottage. He is not here himself because I

have sent him to call Dr. Gorman, if he should be sober enough to attend to you, but he lives beyond Aunas, and Aunas itself is seven miles by road."

The boy did not answer for a moment. He stared at the priest with widening, half-incredulous eyes, as though this statement were hard to understand or hard to believe.

"You mean—" he faltered in a shaking voice, "you mean—safe—not on the island? Safe—and they—I—"

He stopped shuddering—weakening.

"And they?" he went on after a moment's pause; "they? They were after me."

"And who should be after you?" came the priest's reassuring voice. "There was no one after you that Pat could see at all."

The fear that had lurked all along in his eyes was coming to the surface now as recollection grew clearer and more vivid. He was trembling, shivering, twisting his thin hands nervously together.

"You'll not let them get me?" he whispered.

The priest patted his shoulder.

"No one shall get you, my lad," he assured him. "You are safe here with me, safe from anyone or anything."

The boy caught at that.

"Promise," he cried with sudden, pleading energy. "Promise me that. Don't let them have me. Whatever they say or pretend, promise me I shan't go with anyone against my will.

"Oh, I must sound crazy talking like this—but I'm

not. They want me to tell them something. They'll not stop at anything to make me tell.

"Already—see." He held out his hand and showed the wrist covered with newly healed sores and scars.

The priest gave a low exclamation of horror. "You mean—?" he began.

The boy nodded vehemently. "Yes, they did that."

"But who?" the priest asked. "Who did such a devilish thing? And how?"

Hay, with a gesture and shake of his head, flung the question impatiently aside.

"They'd have done worse," he insisted, "but they are afraid. Afraid of killing me, so I'd never tell. So you see—oh, don't you see?—you must not let them have me."

He paused, breathless and troubled, looking at the priest, wondering whether a verbal allusion to his religion would carry more weight than this appeal to their common humanity. After all, this was a priest.

"For the love of God," he murmured weakly, though himself he scarcely believed in God at all.

"But who are they?" the priest insisted gently. "What is it all about? Better tell me, then perhaps I can help you."

Hay had been questioned too often. The very fact that a question had been asked threw him at once on the defensive.

"Listen," he said, sitting up and forcing himself to speak more calmly. "I want help of every kind. I must telephone. I should be safe then—they'd not dare, once

anyone knew I was here. Take me at once where I can do it."

"But it is seven miles—you are not fit to drive so far. You will be catching your death of a chill. Besides at this time of night the office will be shut. And don't I know you are here, and doesn't Pat O'Brien?"

Reasonable enough, and yet he felt no certainty of safety.

"Send someone then," he said; "let me see the police—a magistrate—whatever there is I can appeal to. You say I'm safe, but I don't feel it." His voice grew urgent. "Oh, can't you understand? At once. I must see someone at once."

"And who is it you'd be wishing to see? Pat O'Brien has gone for the doctor. And I tell you it's seven miles to the nearest cottage and they will all be asleep at this time of night. No, no, you must not try to stand up yet! There's Pat's young brother Jim asleep in the next room. He has no English but he'd take a message, or a note if you give it to me for him."

There had been nothing to rouse his suspicions, nothing he could give a name to. Perhaps now as he tried to rise and was restrained he was unconsciously aware of the touch of hands he had felt before.

"Where am I?" he cried sharply. "Help me to the door. I must see out."

The other knew that the view from the door, the sandy beach, the dark sea and chain of rocky islets, each circled with foam and splashed by leaping waves, would tell him everything.

"No, no," he soothed him, "you must not exert your-

self. Lie down, lie still, and I'll send Jim with any message you please."

By this time the boy was struggling fiercely, but with little strength.

"How do you know I must not exert myself?" he gasped angrily. "Who told you that?"

Then suddenly, and again for no reason he could have given in words, suspicion was certainty.

He stopped struggling and his body relaxed. "Oh, God! You are one of them," he wailed and dropped back onto the bed, hiding his face. "I don't know—I don't know," he sobbed. "Nothing at all. Whatever you do I can't tell you."

The priest bent over him, coaxing, soothing, assuring, but he only repeated insistently, "I don't know—I don't know!"

But in his head the unspoken thought was hammering: "I was off my guard, they might have had me then."

"I don't know," he repeated, drowning the priest's assurances and expostulations. "I don't know. My uncle never told me anything at all."

How he wished that it was true, or that by frantic reiteration he could make himself believe it!

"I don't know," he cried piteously, "I don't know. No one can ever make me tell what I don't know."

"Confound it all!" the other man was thinking. "It's not fair. He had no real reason to suspect me. Even now he has not recognised me. It's just some cursed instinct!"

He bent over the boy and saw that his face was grey and his lips bluish.

"And now he is going to faint!"

But Hay swallowed the brandy he offered him, then laughed unsteadily.

"Too dashed clever—that's what you all are," he said. "I'd have told you weeks ago if I'd known."

He looked at his scarred wrists and shuddered reminiscently. "Of course I'd have told you. The fact is I don't even know enough to tell a lie that has a chance of being believed for five minutes or I'd have tried it on. My uncle sent for me when he was dying because—well, I suppose because he wanted to see me, not to tell me any dashed secret. You are all far too confoundedly clever. What do you take me for?"

He laughed again, a pleasant enough laugh at the start, but one that lasted too long and held a suggestion of frayed nerves.

"All the same," he went on, "I nearly did you all that time. A few minutes later and you would never have got me back."

"You were done," the priest said, "you could never have reached land."

"Land? Of course not." The boy looked straight in his face. "I never said I could," he answered smiling, "but I'd have done you all the same."

The priest smiled too. "I see. But we shall take care of you now. You will never have the chance again."

The boy face lit up with recognition.

"Sefton!" he cried. "You! I always said you were the only one with brains. The only one I should be afraid of if I did happen to have a secret I wanted to keep."

"And as it is—" Sefton's voice was caressingly soft

now that he was no longer disguising it. "As it is—not at all?"

"As it is," was the answer, negligently spoken, "I'm more afraid of Putnam. He's big and strong and rough, and dislikes me. But you—once I can make you believe that I don't know anything in the very least bit interesting—you won't want to hurt me."

"That's true," said Sefton very gently. "I've no wish to hurt you. And once you have told us what your uncle told you I'll do my best to see that Putnam doesn't."

The boy shrugged his shoulders.

"Putnam is a beast—a savage—a—" he moved his hand, with a gesture that spoke his contempt—"an inferior animal. How can you work with a thing like that?"

Sefton laughed softly. "I have found Putnam useful before now, and may again before we have done with you," he said. At which the boy cried out pettishly:

"Oh, go away! Can't you see I'm tired out?"

Sefton smiled. "Worn out with your emotions," he suggested, "as they say in old-fashioned novels."

"It was a mean trick!" Hay cried indignantly; "a mean trick! I'd as soon—oh, God, you all make me sick! And now—what do you offer me next?"

"A rest," Sefton replied, "time to think things over."

Hay did not answer at once. "Time," he repeated thoughtfully, "time." He seemed to be thinking aloud. "Time—oh, Lord! more time." His mood changed, he laughed suddenly, then looked at Sefton with a challenging smile.

"You think I am frightened," he said with a touch of

mockery in his voice. "So I am. Horribly. Worse than you think. Why not? Is not the sentiment appropriate to my situation?"

"Singularly appropriate," Sefton agreed, but in his heart he thought, "Here's a dashed plucky kid, if ever I met one."

## CHAPTER II

### THE LADY OF THE LATCHKEY

Tommy Wood stood staring after the disappearing taxi. Romance had beckoned him, had touched him on the shoulder and he had failed—utterly failed—to follow. He had missed the chance of a lifetime. Such a thing could never come his way again.

Never. As long as he lived—and he seemed to see the days and years stretching ahead in drab and dwindling perspective—he would rise every morning early, squeeze onto the Tube and hasten to his uncle's office, or to some other office precisely like it.

He was roused by a staggering thump on the back, and a hearty voice which cried: "Hullo Tommy! This is luck, old man! Fancy running into you like this in the very middle of nowhere in particular!"

He swung round with joyful amazement.

"Mogridge!" he exclaimed incredulously. "Why, I thought you were busily breeding sheep and oranges in Central Africa or something."

"Something—not quite—I mean not exactly, but near enough," was the answer. "So I was more or less, but the fact is I've come in for a bit of money. You remember my cousin, old Chumpy Watson?—well—

"But I never expected to find you here. What are you doing?"

"Oh, well," Tommy began diffidently, "I'm supposed to be learning my uncle's business, you know."

"Blessed if I do. Funny sort of business, standing outside the station looking as glum as a Lord Mayor who has swallowed a brand-new set of false teeth on the way to his own banquet.

"Clever man he must be, your uncle. Does he make a good thing of it?"

Tommy was in no mood for chaff.

"I say," he said, "I'm awfully glad you turned up. I want your advice. A funny sort of thing has happened to me—dashed funny. I don't know what to do about it. At least, you see, it may be too late to do anything at all. But I'd like to hear what you've got to say. I mean—you know—what are you doing now? Have you got time to listen?"

"Oh, just about all the time there is," Mogridge answered lightly. "I have to see the agent about letting the house at Piddlington, and I was thinking of a visit to the tailor, but there's no train back till 5.15, and if I miss that there's no reason why I shouldn't spend a night in town—or two—or any number."

"You're living at Piddlington then?" Tommy asked.

"Yes—in the family ruin. But I don't mean to long. It's a dreary hole. Hanged if they didn't stumble on a cemetery when they were laying the tennis court. About a dozen coffins, complete with skeletons. As I said, I'm looking round a bit. Upsetting experience coming into money unexpectedly. Rotten train service to Piddlington. Land you here in the early hours and refuse to take

you back till your day's work is done—honest eight hours they expect of you.

"I'm hungry. Had no breakfast. Running like a hare to catch that beastly train. Aren't you having any?"

"Thanks, I've had mine," said Tommy.

"All right. You talk while I eat."

They found a quiet table in a place which Tommy said was not good, but not too bad, and he began his story.

"It was on this beastly Tube. My uncle's all right and so's his business, and I'm jolly lucky to have a chance a lot of clever fellows would be glad of. But it does mean getting up confoundedly early in the morning and squeezing into an overcrowded carriage with every other miserable sinner whose daily bread depends on his rising with the misguided lark.

"This morning it was worse than usual. Or perhaps it only seemed worse because of the fish my landlady produced for breakfast. I offered it to the cat and she sniffed it and walked away. Said I'd insulted her, you know."

"Drop the frills and come to the point," Mogridge retorted. "You never could tell a story."

"Hang it all, when I tell a story it's *all* point. Where had I got to?"

"You'd just insulted the cat—or the landlady, I'm not sure which."

"Yes. So I had. Well it was beastly on the Tube. There wasn't space to drop sixpence edgeways between us. I was standing simply wedged and plastered round

with humanity, thinking about the fish and the office and all the rest of it, and feeling fierce and fed up, and wishing something would happen. The train was making the most confounded racket. Bang—crash—clatter—bang. You couldn't have heard an earthquake or the last trumpet.

"And then I did hear something. A voice. Not a loud voice either. Quite low, quite soft, speaking almost in my ear. I am sure no one heard it except me because of the infernal din all round. I seemed to hear it under, not above the noise, if you know what I mean. Quiet, you know, slow and deliberate, and absolutely in my ear.

"It said, 'Do not answer or look round. I want your help. I am in terrible danger. To-night at half past six—'

"Then the train gave a most frightful jolt and threw us all one against the other. A woman lurched against me and pushed a key into my hand. Next moment the train stopped, and everyone was fighting like cats in a bag to get out or find a place. She pushed past me, and then I saw a man was beckoning her to a place further down the train."

"What was she like?" Mogridge asked.

Tommy reflected. He could still recall her image like a picture, but he was never good at descriptions.

"Tall," he meditated, "in a black coat and dark furs. Little black hat, like a pot, that hid three quarters of her face. I couldn't make up my mind whether she was English or not. Looked as if she was, and looked as if she wasn't—rather like a foreigner's picture of an Englishwoman, if you know what I mean."

"What—feet like barges and teeth like tombstones?"

"Oh no—no. Not that kind. 'La belle anglaise' you know and all that sort of rot. Tall and tailor-made and rather distinguished looking. Nose and mouth and chin all on the large side but—well—I mean to say—*all right*, you know."

"Light brown hair and grey or hazel eyes?" Mogridge suggested, as though completing a mental picture.

"No," said Tommy, "not a bit of it. That's where she wasn't true to type. Her eyes—well, I mean her eyes—her eyes, you know—"

"What about them? What was wrong with them?"

"Wrong? Nothing. Nothing at all. But I mean to say her eyes were—well—rather *special*, if you know what I mean. Not English at all. Black. Black as tar. Like wells of black tar, with something burning—smouldering—behind them. I thought they might be Italian or Spanish or some sort of rot like that, you know. But they were *queer*."

"Would you know her again?" Mogridge asked.

Tommy considered. "Well, you know—little tight hat—furs—a long coat. Ladies nowadays don't give one much to swear by, do they? But in England I could take my oath that ninety-nine women out of every hundred were *not* her. You don't see eyes like that once a month—not nearly—and how many eyes do you see in a month in London?"

"A good many, I should think," Mogridge assented. "But go on. What happened next?"

"Nothing," said Tommy. "Plain blank, nothing. It

was just her eyes. Just her. Good Lord, how can I make you understand it? She was scared—scared blue—there was no doubt of that. Just mortally scared, if you know what I mean. She sat straight, staring in front of her. Never looked my way again. Then I saw why. That man, if you'll believe me, was watching her. Not *herself*, you know, but her reflexion in the window. Just imagine. There he was, and there she was. And he was watching her in the window opposite, and she sat there like—oh, Lord—I mean to say—*scared* like a scared rabbit, if you know what I mean. She was afraid, you see, I'd speak or look or give the show away somehow. Seeing how frightened she was of his guessing she had spoken, made me realise how desperate she must have been before she would have done it."

"She was having you on," said Mogridge. "When people are really frightened they go to the police or to their friends. No one appeals to a perfect stranger in the Tube."

"But I saw her face," Tommy insisted, "and I tell you she couldn't have been putting it on. If she had been—don't you see?—she would simply have *had* to look my way to see how much I'd taken in. But she didn't—not once. She sat there staring at her own reflexion and knowing that the man was watching it too."

"The man," said Mogridge. "What about him? What was he like?"

"Oh, I thought he had a solid sort of face. Brainy-looking sort of a bird rather, I should think. Middle-aged—going grey—stoutish, you know, and all that. Just a look of one of those strong silent men you see on

the films. But it was the way he watched her. I simply can't make you see it."

"Would you recognise him if you saw him?"

"Well, I think so, unless he had grown a beard or disguised himself somehow."

"Well, I bet you she was up to no good."

"But my kind fellow, just count ten and think for a minute. What *could* she be up to?

"Of course I've heard all about sirens who lure young men to dens of vice, and all that, then drug them and make off with their money and their watch and the formula for synthetic rubber which they always carry in their pockets—but, hang it all, people with money don't travel on that beastly train at that beastly hour. Besides—look at me. Just imagine—if you were a self-respecting siren, would you take the fag to lure me across the pavement? The price of an indifferent lunch would be honestly all you could expect to get off me. And she was well-dressed and didn't look hungry. Any hopeful siren that tries luring me about the place will deserve the nasty knock she gets when it comes to turning out my pockets."

"When people are in trouble they nearly always have friends they can go to."

"Oh, yes, and if you find yourself in an awkward fix in Constantinople or Nijni-Novgorod, which of your many local pals will you ring up first? I've told you she didn't look altogether English. A foreign girl might easily find herself up a tree in London."

"Then why do you suppose she picked you out of all the people in the train?"

Tommy would have liked to think that something in his face had attracted her, that he looked intelligent, reliable or kind. But he answered honestly, "I don't think she had much choice, I just happened to be near her at the one moment the man couldn't see her, when he was in front of me and she behind in the carriage. It was an almighty squeeze to get in. They must have been separated at the door."

"But why you," Mogridge persisted, "rather than the police?"

Tommy hesitated. "Well—you see—suppose, as I had a sort of an idea, she was half Italian. And then suppose one of those beastly secret societies you read about was out after her. The police never seem much use against them, do they?"

"Keen student of sensational fiction," commented Mogridge. "If you go there for explanations I can think of simply endless possibilities.

"Perhaps she wants to commit a crime at half past six to-night and hopes you will establish an alibi by calling and meeting her twin sister, who is exactly like her. Or else you may find yourself stranded in highly suspicious circumstances with a corpse. Or she may have a husband she is tired of, and aim at making him so jealous that he will presently be hanged for the murder of you, leaving her free to marry the handsome young officer she has been flirting with. Or—your uncle must be fairly well off, I believe, even if you are not—you may very likely be kidnapped and held up to ransom. Best be careful. But go on. What happened?"

"Nothing," said Tommy, "how could it? Of course it

was up to me to give her another chance. That's what I'm so sick about. I saw that. But not in the least how I was going to do it."

"Then she gave no address?"

"How could she? He was watching all the time. I simply squeezed my brains till my teeth rattled trying to think how any of those fellows that have adventures in books would have diverted his attention or got him out of the train. But that's the best of a book. There are all sorts of little accidents which are quite likely to happen, and in a book you can make them, but in real life they do or they don't, and never when you wish they would. I didn't see what to do. I still don't. I just sat there and went on sitting. Passed my own station and just sat on—and sat. She never once looked my way. Didn't dare.

"At last they got out here, so of course I did too. But there was just the mother of all mortal crushes on the platform, so that I never got near them. Once she dropped her bag, but the man picked it up like a hawk. No earthly chance for anyone else. I managed to struggle into the same lift, but they were right over the other side, and I was simply stuck and built into the furthest corner from them. I fought my way out just in time to see them driving off in a taxi. She looked back, but I don't know whether she saw or recognised me.

"Well, what can I do now? Just go back to my uncle and say I'm sorry I'm late? Don't see what else. But she will probably be murdered to-night at 6.30 sharp, and I shall be to blame. And it'll all be in to-morrow's papers with her photograph and all that, and I shall

know that if I'd not been such an ass it need never have happened. Good Lord, Moggy, don't you understand? She asked me to help her, and I'm here—and—and—all that sort of rot, you know."

Mogridge still did not take the matter seriously. "But surely," he said, "in the sort of book you read the hero springs lightly into a passing taxi and says to the driver 'Keep that couple in sight.' "

"Yes," Tommy agreed gloomily, "and tips him a sovereign besides his fare. But, honestly, can you imagine saying anything in the least like that in real life to a perfect stranger? And if he had followed them beyond the next turning but two I'd not have enough in my pocket to pay him at all."

Mogridge reflected a moment.

"The taxi will come back," he suggested, "and the driver, if you find the right one, can tell you where he took them."

"Oh, Lord," Tommy protested, "perhaps he can, but will he? Suppose he just says 'Mind your own business' or 'Go to hell'—or—"

"Make some excuse," his friend interrupted. "Say they asked you to lunch and forgot to tell you their address. Go on," he added, as Tommy made no response, "they must have been noticed as most people at this hour seem to travel with a dispatch case, not a person of the opposite sex. Anyone can tell you which taxi they took—the policeman or one of the other drivers. Go on," as Tommy still hesitated. "It's a good lie that about lunch, everyone must have seen you looking blank and

helpless. Of course she's a fraud, that's certain, but I must own I'd like to know exactly what her game is."

Tommy went. It was a great relief to him to find himself taken in hand and ordered about. He had suffered all his life from an incurable and paralysing nervousness, which made it quite impossible for him to leap into taxis, crying "Keep them in sight" or to do any other conspicuously eccentric thing. But at the same time he longed for adventure and this seemed to promise well. Perhaps there was money in it. If any should come his way—well, he could do with a little. There might be romance as well; indeed, he felt one could scarcely nowadays with any decency rescue a young woman from terrible danger and not fall in love with her. He wished she had been small and fair and rosy, for that was the type he most admired. But yet she was not unattractive.

Mogridge waited at the table till Tommy returned, beaming with his news.

"Yes, that was a good wheeze. The taxi was back already. It was 49a Queen Elizabeth Place. Never heard of it, did you? Shall we get him to drive us there at once?"

"No," said Mogridge positively, "that's not the idea. What exactly did she say to you?"

Tommy repeated, " 'Do not answer or look round. I want your help. I am in terrible danger. To-night at half past six—' "

"Well, it's not that yet, and she evidently thought the precise time important. If you turn up too soon you will probably mess up the whole show, supposing there

is any show to be messed. I'll go along first and see if that really is the place and generally prospect and find out all I can."

"But I say," Tommy suggested gloomily, "suppose they have just given a false address and changed into another taxi. People often do that. They probably have."

"Quite likely," Mogridge assented, unperturbed. "I'll do my best to find them, but of course don't promise. What will you do meanwhile? Attend to your uncle's business?"

Tommy shook his head. "It's as easy to explain why I've been absent as why I am late, and I'm late already. My uncle's like that. If I stay away a whole fortnight and explain afterwards that I've been so busy saving a lady's life that I couldn't come to office, and produce the lady and the life and all that, he won't object a bit. Be rather cheered, in fact. But if I just say I mean to, he won't believe there's any lady at all—or at any rate not one there ought to be, and the result will be a full-sized, first-class family row and me up to my eyebrows in scalding water for being late."

"All right," Mogridge agreed, "I'd better be making a move."

"But where shall we meet, and when?"

"Well, we had better get a map and find Queen Elizabeth Place. Then you can wait as near as seems safe or desirable. Mind now, I'm convinced she's a fraud."

"No, really," said Tommy pleadingly, "you didn't see her—*really*—I mean—and I did."

They bought a map at the nearest book-shop, and

looked out Queen Elizabeth Place. They decided not to drive straight there but to stop a few streets off.

"You wait here," said Mogridge, pointing out a disused cemetery such as serve for parks and playgrounds in some parts of London. "There are plenty of seats and you can buy a newspaper at that shop. You'll be less bored and look more natural. I'll just loaf along there and come back and tell you what I find out."

"All right," Tommy agreed. "But look here—they may be at that address now or may be not, but either way that doesn't prove they will or won't at 6.30 this evening."

"No," said Mogridge, "but give me the key. The door it fits will be the right door."

## CHAPTER III

### LOST BATTLES

Ben Hay—his name happened to be Benedict, not Benjamin, but few people knew that, and it really did not matter, as his friends invariably called him Ben —was sitting on the floor of an empty room clasping his knees. In front of him were shells and pebbles ranged out to represent chessmen, but he had tired of his lonely game, and his mind was occupied with something far more complicated. His thought ran more or less in this fashion:

"They all want money: they are all afraid of Sefton, and in a lesser degree of each other: they are all committed, and each one could give away the rest. That is what keeps them together. That—and I suppose the sort of ill-founded and unreasoning loyalty one does feel for those with whom one shares an adventure—or, presumably, a crime.

"On the other hand, here is Sefton despising Putnam —and Putnam knows it and hates Sefton. But fears him still more. And Putnam himself despises Castle for a soft ass—and Castle hates Putnam for a brutal fool.

"Putnam hates me more than he wants the money, but not more than he fears the rest. Especially Sefton.

"Sefton likes me. Thinks me plucky and less stupid

than his own associates. But business comes first with him. His liking me won't help much. He won't be unnecessarily brutal, but goodness knows what he may think necessary before we are through. He'd be more cruel than Putnam, and hate Putnam for enjoying it.

"Castle is a decent fellow at heart. Weak. I can get at him. He is soft-hearted and sorry for me. But sorrier for himself if he thinks of Sefton annoyed.

"Daly one hardly seems to know. He doesn't look stupid. He is the only one Sefton treats as an equal. No—not an equal—an intelligent assistant. I have a feeling he likes Sefton—admires him or something. The only personal feeling anywhere round that isn't some form of dislike. Leave him out of the reckoning, as he's not about for the moment.

"Putnam—Castle—Sefton. Hatred—fear—contempt. One ought to be able to make something of it all."

His eyes wandered to the little window, already darkening although it was early afternoon, and he thought, "If I could get out that wooden frame I could just squeeze through there."

It was not a comforting reflexion, because, without tools, he obviously could not. He remembered the other room upstairs where he had spent the day after his attempted escape. He had felt horribly seedy and wretched all day, and had not noticed much. It was damp, he remembered, and there were patches on the wall and ceiling that had fascinated him, like continents on a map.

But surely it had been lighter. Was the window larger?

"*This* is impossible," he thought, "I have tried and tested everything. *That* I have not examined. It may or may not offer a chance. But if I ask to be moved Sefton will suspect a motive, and if there is a way out of that room he'll think of it long before I do. And Putnam would keep me here to spite me if I hinted I'd be happier elsewhere.

"Castle—but what's the use of Castle with Sefton against him?"

He began to consider what he would do, if once, by any means, he could get outside the cottage.

Not try to swim again; the distance was too great, the current too strong, the sea too cold. The cliff at the back was the only alternative. Surely from the top one could see the open sea. Perhaps one could signal to a boat or to the shore.

But they would soon miss him and come after him. It would be a steep climb, and exertion still made him terribly breathless and dizzy. Perhaps he could hide in one of those deep cracks, and, when a pursuer came, give a sudden push. But he could only do that once unexpectedly, and Putnam and Sefton were both unusually strong men. Even Castle would be a match for him in this wretched state.

Or if he could deceive them in thinking he had gone swimming again—

He looked up at the window and laughed. He could not get out of that room, and Sefton would never have him moved to another.

"Things are about as bad as they can be," he reflected

moodily, "except that they are likely soon to be much worse. My one and only hope is Castle—Castle in revolt against Sefton and Putnam and their methods."

He laughed again bitterly to himself. "Castle in revolt! Good Lord—he hasn't got it in him. A white rabbit showing fight!"

At this point he heard a step in the passage outside and bent hastily over his game with an almost exaggerated show of interest. Everything he did was done for effect, and it was no part of his plan of existence to appear to mope.

It was Putnam who came in, a heavy, stupid-looking, discontented man, who gazed about him with an air of dull resentment. Hay pretended not to have heard him, and to be absorbed in his game.

Even so their antagonism would have been obvious if there had been anyone there to observe it. It was the inevitable kind that springs not from circumstances or conduct but from something essential in individual character. Putnam, who was born a bully, would have said he disliked Hay because of the airs he gave himself. Actually he felt the stupid man's hatred of the thing he could not understand. As for Hay, he held Putnam to be a fool and a brute, and both despised and feared him.

Putnam locked the door, pocketed the key, and kicked the chessmen across the floor.

"Oh, you, Putnam," murmured Hay without looking up. A less stupid man would have recognised his tone and manner as deliberately insulting; Putnam only felt

an unreasoning irritation and a new access of hatred, as his enemy began quietly gathering up such pieces as were still in reach.

"Yes, me," said Putnam savagely, "and you may as well know that if they had listened to me sooner things would not be as they are now."

"I suppose not," Hay assented with an air of polite but absent-minded boredom that was completely thrown away.

"Castle is a soft ass," the other went on, "and Sefton is a fool to listen to him."

Hay looked up for the first time. "I agree about Castle," he said, "but I don't think Sefton is a fool. I wish he was. He is the only one of you I am really afraid of.

"Of course when you look at me like that I do rather hope you are not going to hit me, because I know it would hurt if you did—but that is not the same thing at all. Sefton has a brain, and he has been a gentleman. At least I think so, it may be just that he has met a few and learnt some of their ways."

Even Putnam could not mistake the insolence of that.

"If I had my way," he growled, "we'd have made you talk long ago."

"Why, of course," Hay assented readily, "it's never difficult to make me talk. My friends all say I talk too much, and that the trouble is to stop me.

"Talk—I am perfectly willing to talk all the time. Nothing I like better. The only difficulty is that you are all bent on my telling you something I don't happen to know."

Putnam scowled. "I'd soon get it out of you if they'd

let me," he said. "Castle is an ass. He says you are ill. Well, you're not. You did get a bit shaken up, anyone might. But now you're all right. Not much the matter with you. Can't be or you'd never have swum as far as you did that night."

"I felt rotten when you got me ashore," Hay volunteered with a pleasant smile. "Rather like recovering from a bad go of flu. And I can't say I have felt awfully bright since. But I daresay Castle does exaggerate a bit. Some people do, you know."

"I'd get it out of you," Putnam repeated. "Sefton is a fool."

The boy shook his head obstinately. "You are all fools except Sefton, if it comes to that. I'm afraid of him. At least I might be. He's damned dishonest and unscrupulous, and all that, like the rest of you, but he has kept some notion of how the mind of a normal, decently brought-up human—which means me, of course —works.

"Sefton knows—almost—how to go to work to find things out. He is hampered by just two things. Only two. But by them he is very badly hampered."

"What are they?"

Hay answered with a frank, engaging smile. "Oh, first my vile temper, secondly the fact that I know far less about this miserable secret than he does."

Putnam bent nearer. "I wish that was true," he said, with a threat in his voice.

Hay laughed. (It was not true that he was altogether unafraid of Putnam when they were alone together, and it was his habit to cover many emotions with a laugh.)

"I only wish it wasn't," he said lightly, "so that I could tell you and have done with it."

"Do you know," Putnam suggested, "what would happen to you if we all believed you really didn't know?"

"Yes," Hay answered him straight; "just what is going to happen to me anyway. What would happen to me, if I did know, the minute I had told you. You can't keep me alive here indefinitely, you can't let me go after what I overheard on the boat. Beastly cramped sort of spot, a boat, for discussing guilty secrets.

"You want one thing of me, and you will keep me until you get it or give up hope of it. Then you will kill me, whatever happens between now and then."

Their eyes met, and Putnam was for a moment abashed by the indecent frankness of this statement. Hay paused, and, so to speak, steadied himself by realising fully the hatred and contempt he felt for the man, then went on in a quiet, explanatory tone.

"If I thought there was any chance of a rescue from outside I shouldn't, of course, be talking like this. My line then would be to gain time by keeping you all in hopes. But there is none—none that I can see. No one will miss me. I am, as you may have noticed, more or less of a friendless orphan.

"They are only two ways I can better my position—"

"And they—?"

"Oh, obvious," Hay answered carelessly, as though speaking of a matter of no moment. "First, of course, make Sefton like me. I'm doing that all I can. He loves to see me cheek you and stand up to him."

"Sefton's in with the rest of us," muttered Putnam disagreeably, "he won't go back on us. You won't get anything out of him."

Hay sighed. "No—I imagine he is perfectly loyal. Tell me, why does that one inconvenient virtue survive all the rest? But you see I'm not hoping to save my life. Only to avoid inconvenience. I think if he really likes me, he may see to me himself at the end, not just leave me about for you."

"Oh, you think so, do you?" growled Putnam. "That's what you think, is it? Suppose I tell you he's promised not to interfere? What does he care? He's all for what he can get."

"Yes," Hay agreed, with pleased alacrity, "that is exactly it. And you—the sentimentalist—are all for pleasure, for following the dictates of your heart. That is, as you seem to imply, the main difference between you.

"So if Sefton won't help me I shall have to turn to you, and bring my second scheme into action."

Putnam felt the insolence in Hay's manner without quite following his words. He bent over him, and took him by the shoulder.

"And what is that?" he asked menacingly.

"Oh *that*—" was the answer, "I don't know that I care to tell you that."

Putnam's grip tightened.

"Well, if I *must*—" Hay went on, "I shall put you in such a rage that you will kill me on the spot."

"You little beast!" growled Putnam, releasing him with a jerk. "I'll get even with you one day."

"Yes," Hay answered, suddenly simple and serious, "I know you will. But it's not to-day."

"I wish you really didn't know," Putnam repeated, "I wish it was true you couldn't tell, and the others didn't believe it."

"Oh, Lord, yes—" Hay was flippant again—"jam for you."

"Sefton's a fool," Putnam ran on dully, being one of those people who are never content to say a thing once, however plainly. "He believes you are ill because Castle says so, but you're not. No more than I am. You needed a rest after last time, and you've had it."

Hay shook himself and sighed fretfully. "Well, go and talk to Castle about it, do," he said. "It makes him perfectly green to hear you describing what you would like to do to me—and it only bores me. That's because he has imagination—heaps of it—and I haven't. I simply can't picture what it would—any of it—feel like or look like, and he can."

This was an opening obvious enough even for Putnam. "Well, you will soon know," he said triumphantly, feeling that he had scored against Hay with his own weapons.

"I suppose so," Hay conceded without interest. "Well, I'll think it over. But there's always a chance Sefton may come in at the end. Realise I'm no earthly use to him and conclude me himself in his efficient, business-like way."

There was a knock at the door, and an apologetic voice outside, "Putnam—I say—Putnam. Are you there?"

"Yes, he's here," Hay shouted back, "but please come in, you won't be in the way."

"I say then—let me in."

Sullenly Putnam unlocked the door and let in a thin, grey-haired, middle-aged man, with a shabby suggestion of better days, and an uneasy, timid manner.

"I say, Putnam—" he began.

"All right," muttered Putnam, scowling darkly, "I'm going."

Castle locked the door behind him then turned to Hay and asked, "What's he been doing?"

"Oh, nothing," was the answer, "nothing at all—just talking."

"Saying—?"

"I forget."

"I thought perhaps I'd better come in."

"No need. But I am always glad to see you. Sefton scares me stiff, and it does take it out of one being civil to a beast like Putnam."

"Civil," Castle hesitated. "Did you say civil?"

Hay laughed his long, nervous laugh. "Well, I have never been as rude to him as I could.

"Oh, do sit down, and let's forget our troubles. What a pity you don't play chess. I play right hand against left, but there's not much in it—my left hand knows far too well what my right hand doeth. But I've worked out some very pretty problems.

"Do you think God ever gets sick of playing chess with us? He's got a sort of stalemate here on this island, hasn't He? Perhaps He'll end the game as Putnam did

this. A tidal wave, an earthquake—and what does it matter what the next move would have been?"

"It's just that I was coming to talk to you about," Castle began awkwardly.

"What? About chess and God and earthquakes? Oh, surely not!"

Castle did not answer at once. Hay's flippancy hurt him. It seemed to sharpen the pathos of the thin, expressive young face, that should have been so very handsome. A face that one would pick out anywhere, it was so intensely alive, a troubling, disquieting sort of face to set one thinking and speculating.

"No," he said after a pause. "About the next move."

Hay glanced up quickly. He felt a little chilled, for Castle looked unhappy and somehow portentous and his words sounded like a prelude to a threat.

"Really?" he asked lightly, but with a sinking heart, "whose next move? Yours or mine?"

Castle laid his hand awkwardly on the boy's shoulder. This display of affection and his reluctance to speak seemed to confirm his fears.

"It's coming," thought Hay, and laughed suddenly from sheer nervousness.

"Look here," said Castle gently, "you will have to tell soon, why not now?"

"It's come," Hay thought, and twisted sharply away from Castle's hand, assuming anger to hide his growing apprehension.

"If you have only come to ask silly questions," he cried, "for God's sake go away and leave me in peace."

"No, no," Castle insisted in a hurt, unhappy voice,

"can't you see it's no use? You will have to tell us. Sefton means you to tell, and he gets what he means." His tone sank to an impressive whisper. "Sefton *always* gets what he means."

"If Sefton were God Almighty," Hay answered vehemently, "he might conceivably make me tell a thing I don't know."

So he said, but what he was thinking was "What will they do to me? I'm not ready—I can't bear it."

Castle could not see the fear that underlay his anger. He went on persuasively, almost imploringly. "No one knows you are here—you can't get away—"

"I know—I know I can't," the boy interrupted furiously, "isn't that the damnable part of it? You've got me here and it suits you all to believe I know a thing I don't. Oh, curse you all, I don't know what the beastly show is about, or what in hell it is you want me to tell you."

Castle looked plaintively at the white, angry face of the boy. If only he would listen to reason and not go off like that.

"Look here," he began timidly, "just listen to me. Sefton is away—"

Sefton away! That was tremendous news—Sefton away. The only man with a brain. Sefton away—then it was worth trying to work on Castle's feelings. Sefton away. That left Castle and Putnam—Castle must be in charge.

And then with a long shiver of relief he realised that with Sefton away nothing new or drastic would be attempted.

"Good Lord," he said with a little laugh, "I thought you had been commissioned to bring me an ultimatum."

"No—thank God," murmured Castle, "No—I only came to see if I couldn't persuade you to be reasonable and tell us. Look here—if you do you shall have half my share—yes, half whatever I get—because I like you and don't want to see you hurt."

"Oh, go away," Hay grumbled irritably, "don't try to be funny."

"You can't escape," Castle went on, "you see you can't. You'd have been drowned if we hadn't picked you out. No one knows you are here. Besides," he lowered his voice confidentially, "Putnam and I have orders to kill you at once if we even suspect there is going to be an attempt."

Hay laughed softly and mockingly. "Have you really?" he asked, and then after a moment's reflexion he added with deliberate mischief, "Poor old Castle, how you would hate the job."

He had control of himself now. Sefton was away, and it was worth trying to work on Castle.

"You will do it yourself, won't you?" he went on; "properly and scientifically, with a humane killer. You know, the thing they use for cows. Have you got one ready?"

"Don't talk rot," said Castle uneasily.

But Hay was merciless. "I know you are a good shot," he pursued, "but you would be upset, your hand would be shaking. Your first three would miss me altogether and goodness knows how many more it would take to finish me. I'd rather be shot by Sefton. He would be

prompt and businesslike and come near enough to make certain of not wasting cartridges.

"But, I say—you won't leave it to Putnam, will you? You'd really like that even less. And someone would have to clean up after. He'd be so fearfully messy and —and *thorough*, you know. Of course he'd rather enjoy it, but neither you nor I would, and I don't see why we shouldn't consider ourselves first in a matter of this kind."

"Don't talk like that," said Castle heavily. "You don't know what you are saying. It's—it's serious."

Hay stole a quick glance and judged the moment ripe. There was no more mockery in his voice or look.

"Serious," he said under his breath. "Yes, serious. Have you thought exactly how serious?" He looked at Castle for a moment, letting his secret terror appear in his wide dark eyes.

At sight of his fear Castle's hopes rose. "You must tell," he whispered excitedly; "it's the only way. You must."

Hay stared at him a moment more, and then said slowly: "The only way—but can't you understand? I don't know." He paused to let that sink in, and then went on in a note of quiet, helpless anger, "I have told you and told you till I'm sick of the sound of my own voice that I don't know."

He hid his face in his hands and shuddered.

"That's not true," said Castle.

"Not true?" Hay cried in sudden exasperation. "Don't you see I'd have told you weeks ago if I could? Whatever the damn thing is worth it's not worth weeks

of infernal boredom and death at the end of it. Don't you remember? Can't you *see?* I don't know!"

"No, no," Castle pleaded earnestly, "that would be too dreadful."

"Dreadful!" Hay echoed him, "oh, but it is, it *is* dreadful." He laughed shudderingly and then caught Castle's wrist with his thin, nervous hand. "Castle—Castle," he pleaded, "will you be a party to it? I don't know what they want to find out. My uncle told me nothing about it. Perhaps he meant to, but he was dying, you know, and talked very little. You say too dreadful—dreadful for you, you mean. Dreadful to know about and think about. But have you thought—for me—how dreadful?" His voice sank to a shaken whisper. "Castle—too dreadful to believe, isn't it? But not too dreadful to be true."

"No, no," the other protested, "you know; you must know; and you will tell."

Hay laughed desolately, bitterly. "It comforts you to think that," he said. "It comforted you before to think that I could stop it if I chose. I suppose it will comfort you again. You know what they will do, you see I am growing stronger. When Sefton comes back they will try to make me tell. You will go out, I suppose, to pick up shells on the beach while Sefton and Putnam—no, not Putnam, he would lose his temper and smash me up in five minutes—Sefton and Daly perhaps—"

"Oh, don't," cried Castle, wretchedly, "don't talk like that, I can't bear it."

"Can't bear it!" Hay laughed. "But I've got to, it seems.

"You needn't mind," he went on cruelly. "You won't be there. You will be out in the boat or on the beach. At least—no. Sefton may want you to feel my pulse and see they don't kill me too quick. And all to make me tell a thing I don't know."

Almost mechanically Castle answered, "That's not true. Sefton is certain you know."

"Sefton—it suits Sefton to be certain, or to appear so. But you—Castle—you," Hay implored him, "you yourself, are you certain? I tell you I don't. Look at me. You yourself, are you certain?"

With a great effort Castle replied. "We are all in this together. I go with the others."

Hay's heart sank. He seemed to feel Castle's mind closing against him. Whether it was loyalty or timidity, some shutter had come down.

"With the others," he whispered slowly, "you go with the others *the whole way?*"

"The whole way," Castle replied automatically.

The boy was conscious of immense effort and utter failure. He felt a slight dizziness and put his hand to his head. He did not know that his colour had changed alarmingly.

"You oughtn't to talk like that, it upsets you so," said Castle anxiously.

"Upsets me so—" Hay repeated vaguely, and then laughed.

"Lie down," Castle urged him, "and rest. You are not strong yet."

Hay smiled a mocking, challenging smile.

"I feel like a missionary," he said, "or a ship-

wrecked sailor whom a kind cannibal is imploring to make a good meal on some particularly nourishing and digestible sort of dish."

Castle felt relieved. After all, if Hay could make fun of the situation like that there could be no need for him to make himself unhappy. It was evident the boy did not realise they were serious, and he would certainly tell once he saw they were.

As for his not knowing, Castle would not consider that possibility. It would put him, Castle, personally in an unbearable position if he believed that. And yet the haunting dread still lingered at the back of his mind. How dreadful—how very dreadful—it would be if Hay were speaking the truth and his uncle had never told him.

"Castle," Hay said pleadingly, "you will think over this that I have told you. And what the others have told you—Sefton and Putnam—about what they will do to make me tell. I don't know whether you will help me or not—"

"No—no—we are all in this together—"

"Well, probably not. But I know you will never be quite happy about it if you let things take their course. Still—I have said all I can—we won't talk of it. You will think of it, I know. Don't go yet. It is dull—boring and lonely. I want to talk. You were saying something. What were we talking about before I started this unprofitable subject?"

Castle hesitated. This sudden transition to wistful friendliness hurt him. There was no denying the boy had wonderful charm when he chose to use it.

"I was saying," Castle began almost apologetically, "that you would have to tell in the end—"

"Good Lord, Castle," Hay cried impatiently, "what a mind you have got! I've told you I can't and suggested a change of subject. I know. We were talking about Putnam. I said he was a beast—well—isn't he?"

Castle looked about him nervously, then spoke in an agitated whisper. "That's another thing. You ought to be careful. Putnam will kill you one day if you go on annoying him."

"I know," Hay snapped back at him, "that will be why I shall do it."

Then he lost patience, and feeling he would never find a natural and artistic transition plunged straight into the subject he was determined to speak of.

"Look here—it's as dark as pitch already. I don't know how you expect a fellow to get well in a gloomy, depressing sort of hole like this. Why can't I be in one of the other rooms? It's dark here by half past two, and isn't light again till eleven o'clock next day. It's deadly. As if the prospect wasn't gloomy enough for me without that. Just look round and see how it makes you feel. It makes me feel like death."

It was so seldom Hay complained, so seldom he asked for anything, Castle hated to refuse.

"You won't be comfortable in the upstairs room," he said pleadingly. "It's falling to pieces and the rain comes in at the roof."

"Oh, Castle," Hay implored him, "you can't let me out—I see that. But light—the room above this—isn't it a little lighter? This gloom is driving me crazy. I don't

care about damp or cold, but I'm sick and hungry for daylight. Oh, can't you understand? Can't I make you understand?"

And because he pitied the boy, and had refused to save his life, and because he half believed what he had told him before, Castle offered this time a weak resistance to persuasion and entreaties; and next morning Hay woke early to examine the possibilities of escape from the damp, half-ruinous upstairs room.

## CHAPTER IV

### OVERHEARD

Mogridge rejoined Tommy in about an hour.

"It all hangs together," he said, "Queen Elizabeth Place is full of shabby looking offices, half a dozen or so in the same building. I went into 49a, the front door stands open, one just walks in."

"Then the key—?" Tommy asked.

Mogridge ignored him. "I pretended I wanted to join the Anti-Swearing League, which has its headquarters there, and walked upstairs. On the first floor on the left there is a room to let. I had the chance to try your key, and it fits. I looked in—the room is empty—dusty—"

"Oh, I say—" murmured Tommy ecstatically.

"I enquired and found that the whole place is locked up about seven, sometimes a little earlier.

"The lady evidently wanted you to get in at 6.30, before the front door shuts, and wait in the empty room.

"Oh, and they say the top floor is not offices but has just been let to a lady and gentleman who are the only people who sleep in the building. It is a dingy sort of place. I shouldn't think there were many people sleeping in the whole street except perhaps a few caretakers in basements. It looks to me amazingly like a trap. I'd better come along with you."

"No, no," Tommy protested excitedly, "that's not the idea at all, then if one was caught we both should be. You wait outside, and if you hear suspicious noises or if I don't come back, why then you fly to the rescue. That's the way it's always done."

"That's all very well," said Mogridge, "but how could I know how long to give you? If I'm not mistaken, she only said 6.30 because that is the last time the front door is certain to be open. She may not want you till simply any time in the night.

"I know though there is a sort of balcony to the window—hardly a balcony, just a slightly exaggerated window ledge. I'll slip into the room with you and wait on that outside."

"But won't you be a bit conspicuous?" Tommy suggested, "from the street I mean." He was eager to have Mogridge's help, so eager that he could see nothing but objections to his presence, being one of those unfortunate people who always see most plainly the reasons why they should not have the thing they most desire.

"I don't think so," said Mogridge, "there is no street that side, only a yard—just old tin cans, broken flower pots and so on."

"But windows," Tommy objected, "don't any windows look that way?"

"Very few, and those seem to belong to the same kind of place that shuts up at night. I had a look all round outside, that's what kept me so long. And, of course, you see it would soon be getting dark. Or if it seemed better, I could easily drop into the yard; there is plenty of good cover there."

Queen Elizabeth Place towards 6.30 was full of people swarming out of its shabby shops and offices and hurrying to catch their trains. Tommy and Mogridge chose a moment when no one seemed to be looking their way, went up the first flight, and let themselves into the empty room on the left.

Time passed slowly as they waited, not daring to talk for fear their voices should be heard in the next room. From other parts of the building they heard desks and doors opening and shutting and, voices and footsteps on the stairs. At last everything was still, then Mogridge went to the window and leaned out.

"There's a light above us to the right," he whispered. "Every other window is dark."

Tommy joined him. "You'd be safer in the yard below," he suggested, "you might be seen on the ledge."

"All right. Can you see through the keyhole or crack of the door? You had better watch, if so. I'll come at once if you call or wave."

Mogridge dropped quietly into the yard and Tommy stood watching the stairs through the crack of the door.

He reflected as he did so that though he was where the lady had intended him to be she did not know he was there, and, consequently, if Mogridge was right, and she had only indicated the empty room as a convenient place to wait in till she could speak to him again, it was quite likely she would never come near him, and would be murdered, not perhaps at 6.30 sharp, but some time during the night.

Perhaps, he thought gloomily, she was in the lighted room upstairs. Perhaps she was being murdered there

now and he was waiting below doing nothing at all.

Mogridge would hear if she screamed. Probably he would too, but it might be too late to interfere by then.

Dared he, he wondered, creep upstairs and listen outside the door of the lighted room? It was risky, for the stairs were old and creaked savagely, but there was also a risk in staying too long.

Very cautiously he opened the door, then, quickly, he closed it again, for he heard the front door unlock. His heart beat hard as he waited with his eye to the crack. He heard someone come in, and steps on the stairs. This was adventure. This was the real thing at last!

It was dark on the stairs and the landing. He could only see the figure of a man coming up slowly. Then a door opened above, and he heard someone coming down.

The two men met just outside the door where he was standing, and the second might easily be, by height and build, the man he had seen in the train. The other was slightly taller and not quite so heavily built. A fine, strong figure of a man.

"No success, I suppose?" the man from upstairs asked in a low, growling whisper.

The other laughed. "Queer little blighter," he said. His voice was soft and smooth. Anywhere else Tommy would have thought it pleasant.

"He's—well—he rather interests me. We have to go a different way to work. That was why I sent you for the girl. Where is she?"

"Upstairs."

"Good. What have you told her?"

"Oh, just enough to keep her quiet and make her perfectly amenable. I couldn't risk her speaking to anyone. We're in luck, she thinks no end of him and will do simply anything to save him. I haven't tried to find out if she knows—but if she does—"

"Likely—" the other interrupted contemptuously, "When has he had a chance of telling her? But come on now. Don't contradict me. I'll tell you afterwards how much is true. Let's go on now and deal with her."

Deal with her? But no. Their whole conversation showed that it was not immediate murder they were contemplating.

Tommy ran to the window. Now was his chance, now while they were still on the stairs. They would be far less likely to hear him. He signalled to Mogridge, who appeared instantly in the yard below him.

" I say," Tommy whispered, "I want help. The window ledge above to the right. Give me a hand—quick—then wait here. It's just *it!* Goodness knows what's up. Tell you later."

Some London houses seem as though they had been designed with the express purpose of not discouraging the elderly or slightly incompetent burglar.

Tommy, who had been a great birds' nester as a school-boy had done far harder things on cliffs and trees. Mogridge, standing below, gave him all the little help he needed at the start.

Still it took time, and the finish was nervous work, for he guessed the two men would be in the room by now, and the window was open, and its curtain flapping abroad. The ledge had looked adequate from below, but

it did not seem it, as he flattened himself against the wall, and hoped he was not as conspicuous as he felt.

A woman was speaking inside the room. Her voice sounded flat and strained, as though she found self-control difficult.

"What do you want? I'll write to him if you like. I'll say whatever you please. But it won't be any use. You don't know him."

A man answered, the man from downstairs, with the soft, smooth, gentle voice.

"Do you know, I begin to feel as if we were beginning to know him rather well."

"What do you mean?" the woman asked angrily, and then despondently, "Well—very well. Tell me what to say. Here's paper. Dictate."

There was a note of polite expostulation in the answer:

"Aren't you being just a little childish? Do we know you or him well enough for that? How can we dictate? He will never suppose for a moment that the letter was genuine."

Sullenly she answered, "He knows my writing."

"That's easily imitated," said the man, "but there must be phrases or references you can use that will assure him it really is his sister who is writing. Come now, you know you can write a letter which he cannot for a moment imagine is a forgery."

"Oh, yes," she assented grudgingly, "I can. But he will not suppose I am writing willingly. He will think you are holding a pistol at my head."

"I see no objection to his thinking that, since—metaphorically speaking—we are."

There was a moment's pause and then, "I understand," she said quietly, "you want me to tell him you are threatening me."

"Tell him anything, provided you persuade him. Tell him that by all means."

Again a pause, and then she asked abruptly. "Is it true?"

"Why, actually of course, we should much prefer to threaten him."

She laughed suddenly. "I see," she said, "him to me and me to him."

That reply pleased Tommy. It showed a ready mind and an apt tongue, a power to think clearly and speak concisely.

"As you please," said the man, "put it that way if you like. Actually him, not only to you—to himself quite a lot."

"And me? Me to myself?"

"I don't think we need consider that at present, since you are ready to do all we ask. We should always regret the necessity."

"Give me the paper." Her voice was curiously harsh and a little tremulous, a strange contrast to the smooth tones of the other speaker. Here, thought Tommy, was a woman who felt deeply, but who controlled herself and made no parade of her emotions.

After a considerable pause she went on: "It is difficult. I have never—lied to him or tried to influence

him. I don't know what to say. I suppose I ought to appear—upset—frightened—"

"It is for his good," said the man softly, "the only way to save him. We are serious—quite serious—*very* serious—in threatening him."

"But apparently," she answered, "you haven't succeeded in persuading *him* that you are serious—or else—" she paused and her voice sank so that Tommy could scarcely catch her words, "or else—for some reason he values his secret very highly."

"Your brother," came the man's gentle voice, "is not always perfectly reasonable. In fact, we have had the misfortune to annoy him, and he has—if I may put it so crudely—the obstinacy of a mule, and the temper of a devil."

She laughed again, a hurt, unhappy laugh that told Tommy she was fond of her brother, that she recognised the description as not untrue, and somehow rather liked it; probably because it reminded her of him.

"You must admit," she said in a constrained voice, "he is not a fool."

"No—no—" the man answered smoothly, "he is not a fool—and he is not a coward."

Tommy caught some strange stress of meaning in the last phrase, so did the woman, for she cried out sharply, "What do you mean? Why do you say that?"

"I say that," was the reply, "because, a few days ago, just before I came away, he made a determined attempt to kill himself."

The other man gave a startled exclamation, and the

woman cried, "No, no, that's not true!" and burst into tears.

Tommy heard her sobbing steadily—heavily—like one who yields at last to a powerful emotion long held in check. He pictured her bowed over the table with her head on her arm. He had seen women cry like that on the stage, never in real life. For a few minutes no one spoke, and then the man's voice came soothingly, "Come, come, I only told you that so that you might see that it really is necessary for you to do something."

She must have jumped up, for Tommy heard the scrape of a chair pushed back.

"I won't," she cried harshly through her sobs. "I won't do anything. He can kill himself if he likes."

"Oh, no," was the soft answer, "the trouble is he really can't."

"I don't care," she went on wildly, "I'll do nothing for you. You tell me this. Is it even true? How do I know? He may be dead already. You may have killed him."

"In that case," the man pointed out, "there would be very little point in asking you to write to him."

She was too angry to notice the interruption. Her vehement speech was broken by gulping sobs. "He may be dead. I must see him. I'll do nothing for you. Nothing. Nothing till I see him."

"But you can't possibly see him," the man expostulated.

"Why not?" she cried. "Because he is dead I sup-

pose. Because you have killed him. Let me see him. Then perhaps I will try to persuade him to tell you what you want. But I'll not write. I'll not write. If he values his secret—enough—like that—there is more in it than I know. If what you tell me is true, there is more, too, that you haven't told me." The noise of tearing paper told Tommy that she was destroying the letter she had begun to write.

"But don't you see?" the man protested. "Really it isn't possible—"

"Then," she screamed, "he can kill himself or you can kill him. I don't care—" and again she broke into a storm of sobbing.

"I think, Daly," said the man of the gentle voice, "it would be a good plan if you took her to her room. Then come back here. Lock her in, of course."

"Kill himself!" she cried in a choking voice. "It's a lie. I don't believe it. Oh, what have you done to him? I will have you all hung!"

"It is hardly necessary to remind you," said the other, "that to have us hung, or even arrested or shadowed, would have the most unfortunate results for your brother. If anyone suspects that you have appealed to the police—to *anyone*—they will hang your brother, you know."

"I don't care," she wailed, "they can do what they like."

But Tommy knew by her voice that she was beaten, and he understood her terror in the train.

"Take her to her room," the man went on, "then come back to me here. There is nothing to gain by dis-

cussing matters with her till she is calmer. We will consider whether it is possible to let you see him."

"Come on," growled the second man, who had not spoken since they came upstairs. His voice was rough and harsh, but Tommy was glad he was there. He would not have liked his lady of the latch key to be alone with the other.

Evidently she did not go at once, for Tommy heard no movement, and then came her voice again, with a pleading, tremulous note.

"Don't you see?" she insisted, "I might have a chance then of persuading him to tell me, and I could pass it on to you, and he need never know how you had found out; I might somehow—but I must see him. I must. Let me see him and I promise you I will do all I can. I would have a better chance than you. You say you know him—well—have you found him easy to drive? Don't you think I might be able—? He trusts me—I might be able—" her voice trailed away inaudibly as though the shame of what she would have said made speech impossible.

"Go to your room now," the man answered firmly but not unkindly. "We will talk it over and let you know in the morning whether it is possible to let you see him or not. There are difficulties—very serious difficulties.

"Daly, take her to her room."

Tommy heard the door open, and heard the woman say: "Otherwise I will do nothing—nothing."

For a few minutes everything was quiet, then the man who remained in the room gave a colossal yawn, and then Daly came back.

"I begin to see a certain faint resemblance," said the pleasant voice of the man from downstairs.

"Uncertain tempered beasts, both of them," growled Daly, and then he asked sharply, "I say was that true?"

The other yawned again before answering. "Part of it. What in particular?"

"That young Hay tried to kill himself."

"He dashed near succeeded—I don't know that he tried. He got loose one night and tried to swim ashore."

"May have thought he could," commented Daly thoughtfully. "It doesn't look impossible if you don't know of the current. Not to a good swimmer."

"Hay is not a good swimmer. It may not have been deliberate suicide, but it was a pretty desperate risk. He was done when we got him in, he still had further to go than he had done already, and he made no attempt to turn back. Must have known by then that it was his only chance. Now that's what puzzles me. Why should he kill himself rather than tell us if there isn't more in it than we know? That struck his sister too. 'If he values his secret like that—' she said—'like that—' more than his life. . . .

"What do you think?"

"What you said," growled the other. "Got his back up. Obstinacy of a mule, temper of a devil.

"Besides men have died before now trying to make a fortune. Nothing new in that. Or he may be bluffing—still expecting to be rescued."

"Rescued! That's out of the question!" the other exclaimed impatiently. "He'd not go drowning himself if he was hoping to be rescued. And as for the fortune,

if he tells us we get it, if he doesn't no one does—neither he, nor his sister, nor friends. Is the difference worth dying over?"

"Lord, I believe he'd kill himself just to spite us. Look how he goes on with old Putnam!

"But I say, you know you made a mistake telling her that."

"What?"

"That he tried to kill himself. She was ready to write before."

The other laughed. "Write! My good fellow, what is the use of her writing? I came here to get a move on. We are in a fix. We're stuck. Hay won't tell and we can't make him."

"You might try stronger measures."

"Oh yes—you and Putnam. You'd have him die on us, and spoil our last chance."

"Castle's a soft-hearted ass."

"I daresay. Still the kid didn't look up to much, and he did a series of faints that kept us all busy. And now this swim—that hurt him bad. I tell you he dashed near killed himself. It was suicide. Current or not, he can't have thought he was going to get across—at the start he may have—but he never turned back when he saw it was impossible."

"But now—what do you mean. Is he seriously ill?"

"Oh, no—nothing—strain—fatigue—what young boys get who overdo their sports. He'll outgrow it—if he lives. I should say he'd get over it quite soon if he would keep quiet. But that is just what he won't.

"Do you know I rather like him."

"You would," Daly grumbled.

"I do—but that's not to the point. As I was saying, we can't make him tell."

"If that's so, why keep him?"

"Keep him? Why? What do you mean? We certainly can't let him go."

"Of course not. Not now. Whether he tells or not, we can't. That's obvious, isn't it?"

"Yes, and I am sorry. As I was saying, I like him. He'd have been a fine partner in this sort of job.

"Well, he is getting sick of the show, so am I. His sister says she must see him. That is good. That is what I was working for all the time. That's why I had you bring her over from France."

"Do you think," asked Daly incredulously, "he really will tell her?"

"Not he—not a hope," was the answer, "not while we have hold of them. We have to arrange something pretty subtle. We get her out there, she asks him perhaps, and he won't tell. Then we must let her think she is engineering an escape. He must think so too. Then when he feels safe and away he may tell her—or tell someone—or act in some way that will give us a clue. My idea is we must plant someone out there to help her."

"But I say," Daly objected, "doesn't all this coming and going in such a lonely place attract attention?"

"It does. Yes, of course it does in a way. But we pay fellows to look out. They think we smuggle arms or whiskey or engage in some sympathetic form of lawbreaking. The rest of the world thinks we are botanists.

It seems that the whole coast is interesting to botanists. Apparently the natives are used to them."

"It looks pretty bleak and barren all along—"

"Oh, yes—but you'd never guess the kind of rubbish that appeals to a botanist. A small boy turned up just the other day with two—a rotten little yellow thing, three inches high, with flowers the size of pin-points, and an attractive little blue affair with leaves like grass. It seems someone had said they were very rare, and he was keen to show me where they grew.

"I'm thinking of looking up a little botany, enough not to appear too utterly unintelligent if the local rustic turns up with specimens."

"Then about the girl—what are you planning to do?"

"Well Dawson will have to go out there—"

"Why Dawson? Is he quite the man you want?"

"Who else is there? She has seen you and me, so has her brother, and he has seen Putnam and Castle too."

"He's seen Dawson as well."

"When?"

"Certainly on the boat, possibly in London too."

"He can't have seen much of him either time. I think it will have to be Dawson. He must wear a beard and glasses. I'll wire to him, 'Don't shave.' "

"Putnam and Castle don't know Dawson either."

"I'll write to them, and he can take a letter. It's not a job just anyone can do. He has to take in Hay as well as his sister, and he, as she says, is no fool."

"I think he is a damned fool not to see when his game is up and tell us."

"Well, what is his game? Do we know that? His sister may be right—more in it than we know.

"Besides, as you say, we can't keep him. He may realise that; if so, what does he gain by telling? Only a quicker end—and he's not reached the point of wanting that yet. Nowhere near it."

There was a pause, then Daly muttered reflectively, "I suppose he really knows. We seem to take it for granted, but he's never admitted it. After all, have we any proof?"

"Oh, yes," was the smooth, assured answer, "he knows all right. He is not a good liar—not at all. Or rather, when he says he doesn't know he doesn't expect us to believe him."

"Why say it then?"

"Outer defences. He is frightened. Badly frightened."

Again they were silent, then Daly growled, "What I said—what we both said and agreed about not letting him go—if we work this plan he may talk to his sister—what about her?"

"They will hang you for one," said the pleasant voice indifferently; "they can't hang you twice for two."

"Good Lord," muttered Daly, "is that necessary?"

"Use your brain," was the answer, "think it out—what do you propose? Why doesn't she go for the police now?"

"She knows if she does they will kill her brother."

"Exactly. That's all the hold we have. I admit it is enough while it lasts, but once he is dead and she knows it—"

"Need she know it?" Daly interrupted uneasily.

"Don't talk rot," the other replied, "she suspects it already."

Again there was a pause, then Daly faltered apologetically, "I—I—don't like it."

"Nor do I," was the answer, "but I like killing Hay still less. He is a plucky kid, when all is said—worth two of her."

Daly did not answer, but grumbled that it was cold. Tommy guessed what was coming, and flattened himself against the wall, it seemed as though that were his only chance. Actually he could have got away, for Daly continued to complain of the draught and chill until the other said sharply. "Then get up and shut the window."

All this cold-blooded talk of keeping or not keeping people made Tommy extremely nervous. "They certainly won't keep me if they find me here," he thought.

Still Daly did not hurry. "I don't like it," he muttered, "I don't like it at all. A dashed good-looking woman."

"And a good-looking man," the other put in, "young Hay, if he lives to be a man at all."

By this time Daly's hand was on the window. Tommy stiffened and held his breath, but fortunately Daly did not look out.

Once the window was closed Tommy could not catch what they were saying, though he could still hear their voices. He ventured to look in through the untidily drawn curtain and saw the man he had noticed in the train, and realised from his growling voice that he was Daly. The other was handsome, rather sharp-featured,

very strongly built, with assured, deliberate movements that matched the smooth tones of his voice.

Tommy watched them a few moments. Daly seemed to be listening, making occasional suggestions while the other unfolded his plans.

Then, as it did not seem as though he could learn anything useful, he climbed carefully down to the balcony below, where Mogridge was waiting anxious and expectant.

## CHAPTER V

### MORE LOST BATTLES

THE moon was bright, the wind cold and penetrating, with a promise of rain. Hay stood, trembling with exertion and excitement on the patch of sand outside the cottage.

He looked up at the cliff, down to the sea, and back to the cliff again. The moonlight was like pale-green frost on the rocks. One moment more he stood, strained, listening intently. The cottage was silent and still.

Then he ran straight down to the water's edge, took off his shoes and socks, and waded a few yards, to where large boulders came down to the sea closing in the little bay. He made his way back to the base of the cliff very carefully, stepping in pools so as to leave no mark.

He ought, of course, to leave at least his coat and shoes on the beach, but dared not risk it in that searching cold.

"After all," he thought, "I might very likely have hidden them under a stone—or started without them. They won't stop to search for my clothes when they miss me."

He paused a moment at the base of the cliff, and then began to climb.

Before his first attempt at escape he had sometimes

been out on the shore, and then, while talking of the gulls and seeming to watch them, he had studied possible ways up the cliff. But in the moonlight everything looked different. Besides, he had overestimated his strength. Every moment he had to stop for dizziness and want of breath. And it was bitterly cold. He had forgotten to allow for the cold in making his plans. Exertion, fatigue, did not warm him, and his hands were growing chilly and powerless.

"It's a chance," he thought to himself, "only a chance —only a chance. But after all it *is* an only chance."

He moved carefully, sparing his strength, which was not an easy thing to do, with excitement, fear, eagerness and hope all urging him on.

Then suddenly he froze rigid. The cottage door had opened and two men with a lantern were standing outside. They evidently saw his tracks on the sand and followed it down to the sea.

They had their backs to him, and he realised that he was in full moonlight, so that if they turned his way they must see him. A little to the left there was a black shadow where he would be invisible. If only they did not look round suddenly and catch him on the move!

Knowing they might turn any moment he made all possible haste and just as he reached the shadow a startled sea bird flew out with a wild clamour. Breathless, sick, with a furiously beating heart, he crouched in the darkness and saw his enemies turn towards the cliff.

"Oh, Lord," he thought, "they are sure to think I disturbed that bird. I did, of course, but I needn't have, it might have been a thousand other things. They'll draw a

perfectly right conclusion, from utterly insufficient evidence."

Sick with hope and fear, he watched them black against the glitter of the sea. He tried to read their dim gestures, but as he watched a change came over them. They grew blurred. Their outlines merged into the background, and they became two shapeless, moving shadows. For a moment he did not realise the meaning of the change, and then he saw that a heavy cloud had come over the moon, and sky and sea were darkening.

Castle had awakened in the night and felt cold; he pulled his blankets round him and then he remembered Hay upstairs in a damp and draughty room with a leaky roof.

"He'll feel the change in the weather up there," he thought.

Then after a moment, "Poor kid—he'll catch a chill perhaps. Certainly be beastly uncomfortable. I'll take him up an extra rug."

And so it was that Hay was missed long before morning.

His tracks were clear down to the water's edge. Putnam swore under his breath. "Little beast," he muttered, "drowned himself to spite us."

"I don't know," mused Castle, "he may have tried to land on one of the other islands, or even on the other side of this. We had better get the boat out and look for him. He knows he can't reach the mainland, but he may get into difficulties anywhere."

Just then with a startling scream a sea gull flew out

from the cliff. Both men turned back from the sea and stared.

"He's there," said Castle with conviction, "I know he is."

Black and white the cliff stood with the moonlight on its face; the echoes died down and all was silent and still.

"I wonder how much start he has," Putnam said, "and which way he took."

Castle looked at the cliff. "He's probably gone up behind the cottage, up the part he could see from his window. He was always staring out you know. He can't go fast, but he may have been going some time."

The bright light on the rock dimmed as they gazed and the whole cliff seemed to recede into darkening night.

"Can't see him unless he moves," growled Putnam.

"No," Castle agreed, "but he can probably see us, and he won't move while we stand watching him. Look here—he meant us to think he had taken to the water—that's what these tracks mean—if we put out in the boat he'll go on. We can just go out a little way then and come back."

But Putnam saw a better plan. "He can't see in this light how many there are in the boat. You go off, land on the other side of the island, I'll hide here and watch. When he thinks he's safe he will move on and I shall see or hear him and go after."

"But—" Castle hesitated, "You and he—will you be all right?"

"You go after him then," Putnam suggested sulkily, "and I'll take the boat. It's just as you please."

Castle looked up at the shadowy cliff. He would have been afraid to attempt it even in daylight.

"All right," he said, "you go. But remember—Sefton will be angry if you hurt him."

"Angrier still if he gets away," was Putnam's comment.

Hay found the climbing harder than he had expected, and he had not expected to find it easy. His muscles were weak from long disuse, but it was not that that hampered him so much as horrible attacks of breathlessness and dizziness. "Must take it easy," he kept telling himself, "take it easy or I'll never stick it."

It was hard to take it easy when he knew that they had missed him and were out after him. Time was like some precious, tangible substance; he could feel it slipping from him as he leaned panting against the rock, or shut his eyes to subdue the horrible nausea of weakness and fatigue. Time—he would have liked to beat it out and spread it thin like gold leaf, but it took so much—great chunks—to cover each yard of his difficult, painful way.

And now, below him he heard unmistakable sounds and knew that he was followed. He stood still—why not?—to escape by speed from a man in ordinary health was impossible, he must gather his wits and use his brain. He looked about for a place to hide, where he might let his pursuers pass him, and then he remembered the restricted view from his window and knew

that straight above him he would find what he wanted.

For a few sheer feet he let himself go as fear and eagerness drove him and then for a minute or two lay gasping on a ledge where he knew he was hidden from below.

The first stone he tried to move was too heavy, the second was loose and round so that without much trouble he rolled it to the edge. He felt a moment's touch of compunction—suppose it should be Castle? Actually Castle had been kind to him and he did not dislike him.

But he hardened his heart. Castle had had his chance and had said he would go with the others. Well, so he should. "And my life is as good as Castle's any day," he reflected.

He could hear the breathing of the man below him and the brushing of his clothes against the rock.

Now!

The stone crashed over, but it struck some slight projection and glanced outward so that it missed Putnam's shoulder by an inch. Hay sprang up, looked over, and saw that Putnam had moved to the right out of danger. There would be no second chance. He ran along the ledge a little way to where it widened and there he waited in the shadow of the cliff. Escape was impossible, and here was as good a place as another for a hopeless fight. Perhaps not even quite hopeless, as his footing was secure and Putnam might be taken by surprise.

He waited—waited—waited and then with a sudden cry sprang out, but when his first push failed he knew that his chance was gone. He fought on desperately,

knowing himself beaten, and wishing he could die fighting. Putnam had had a narrow escape and his fear had turned to furious hatred. He felt he could hammer the boy as he liked now and do it in self-defence. Hay had got in one sharp blow just above his eye, but suddenly his strength failed. Putnam forced him down onto the ground and held him there, then looked up and realised that they were both on the very edge. The little beast had nearly had him again.

Hay lay still with his eyes shut, but Putnam knew that he had not fainted.

"Now, listen," he whispered, "you are going over, over the cliff as you meant me to, onto the rocks below."

Hay made no sign. He lay quiet, panting for breath.

Putnam took him up, relaxed and unresisting and dragged him to the edge. He was a strong man, it took very little effort.

He laughed to himself, thinking how he would tell Sefton, "I had to do it, it was him or me. I had no choice." For the moment hatred had flooded out all fear and all greed. His mind was single, and he felt a sweet, triumphant satisfaction.

Easily he raised the boy, and swung him outwards, but at the last moment Hay clutched him with an angry laugh and they went over together.

Neither doubted for a moment that they were both going to death among the boulders below; but the drop was not as sheer as it looked from above. They fell a few feet, and landed on a steep grassy slope down which they rolled and slipped for some way. At the very edge Putnam caught a bush and saved himself. He clung there

a few moments trembling and gasping and scarcely believing his luck. Then he crept carefully nearer and looked over.

Hay lay among a tumble of broken rocks at the foot of the cliff. Actually he had not fallen very far. He lay still, but his attitude did not suggest that his back or neck was broken. Unless he had happened to smash his head on a stone he was almost certainly alive, and quite probably not seriously hurt.

All Putnam's dull hatred welled up, nearly choking him. He remembered the boy's insolence, his undisguised contempt, his mockery—in a word, "his airs"—and he remembered these last two deliberate attempts to kill him. Twice he had found the little reptile waiting. He felt an absolute need to smash him then and there. He would have liked to pile the whole cliff on top of him—to stamp in his face with his boot. With a sudden rush of righteous indignation he remembered the stone that had just missed his shoulder, and the moment of wild terror when he had lost his balance on the edge of the cliff. It seemed only just requital to send a rock over—two—three. The stones glanced among the boulders where Hay was lying but it was impossible to see whether they struck him or not.

Then he scrambled down, and in a few moments stood looking at the slight, still figure of his enemy. "Poisonous little reptile!" muttered Putnam, remembering his narrow escape.

Hay stirred and groaned.

"Not dead—" Putnam took up a stone and held it ready with two hands over the boy's head. Sefton's

anger, the loss of the treasure were nothing to the satisfaction of his hatred.

Then Hay opened his eyes, and for a moment they held terror undisguised when he saw Putnam standing above him with the stone ready in his hands.

"Your friends would rather see you dead than me," he whispered faintly, then shut his eyes again, not waiting to see the effect of his words.

Physical exhaustion and a sense of utter defeat broke over him like a great wave and left him indifferent. He was upon occasion a magnificent actor, but no assumed part could have served him as well as that piece of purest nature.

Putnam's mind, like that of most stupid people, worked obscurely. He could not have told why suddenly he felt less inclined to smash the face he hated, or why his triumph seemed empty and unsatisfying. Either fear or defiance would probably have roused his natural savagery, but lack of interest—inattention on the part of the victim—he found disconcerting. It would have been like killing the dead to kill one who lay with his eyes shut, motionless except for the hard labour of his breathing.

"Well, get up," he said, "and come along."

Hay moved again and groaned, "Oh, Lord!"

"Get up," Putnam repeated.

Hay opened his eyes, "I don't think I can," he panted.

"Well you had better try," Putnam threatened him.

"My leg," moaned Hay, "broken, I think. Can't move."

Putnam bent down and took hold of him, then saw that he had fainted.

When Castle came back Putnam had his version of the story ready, and made it clear that he had acted from first to last simply in self-defence.

Hay heard him lie and did not contradict. He was not one of those who value the truth for its own sake. Putnam might tell for the moment any tale he chose. One day it might suit him to give his own version, but he did not see that any useful purpose would be served by telling it now.

Besides he did not want to talk. It seemed to him that it required all his attention and energy to keep alive while Castle examined and attended to him. Castle was not a doctor, no one quite knew where or how he had acquired the scraps of medical and surgical knowledge he did undoubtedly possess.

"Good Lord, Castle," Hay complained at last, "are you trying to make me tell you things I don't know? I'll tell you any mortal thing I can if you'll let me alone for a bit."

"Poor boy," murmured Castle sympathetically. "I'm afraid it is very painful, but you really shouldn't have tried to kill Putnam, you know."

Hay felt too feeble for any comment on that, beyond, "Putnam! Good Lord!"

It was some hours later that he asked Castle hopefully, "I say, am I going to die?"

"Oh, no," Castle soothed him, "not a bit of it. Noth-

ing like. You have broken your right arm and right leg, that's all except for scratches and bruises."

Again Hay said, "Good Lord!"

There was a long pause. Castle pitied the boy and thought, "I would give a lot for him not to have to suffer."

"I'd never kill myself," Hay said at last, "I haven't the nerve or persistence to do it without the proper tools." He paused again, and went on: "And if I had them I'd be using them on someone else. I couldn't resist it."

"Dear, dear," said Castle sadly, and then to comfort himself by making it seem Hay's fault, he added, "you really shouldn't have tried to kill Putnam."

Hay laughed an unhappy, desolate laugh, and whispered, "I'd have done the same to you—why not?"

"I say," said Castle, touched by Hay's misery, "you can have all my share if you'll only tell. All the whole of it. I'd give more to be clear of this."

"Great heavens!" Hay moaned, "and don't you think I would? What kind of a demented miser do you suppose I am?"

Castle's mind closed with a click.

"I go with the others," he said, "we know you know, we are certain of it."

Hay groaned, "Oh, Lord, I wish I was dead. Why does it take such a deuce of a lot to kill one?"

## CHAPTER VI

### EMERGENCY

HASTILY and in a low voice Tommy repeated to Mogridge what he had heard.

"There's only one thing to be done," said Mogridge decisively, "one of us must be Dawson."

"Great pollywogs!" said Tommy. "How?"

"What did they say?" Mogridge went on. " 'Plant someone there,' and 'he must take letters—' Well if we could plant ourselves there before him and his bag of letters—"

"But we don't know where 'there' is," Tommy objected.

"No, we must find out. They can't be starting immediately. They've got to get hold of Dawson and fix up with him—and 'I'll write to them,' means that the letter will get there first, so that he is expected. Expected, you remember, by people who have never seen him. These two will not turn up till later, otherwise why write when a verbal introduction would be possible?

"And Dawson is evidently not in London—'Wire to him', 'Don't shave'—there would be no sense in that if they were going to see him to-morrow.

"Now, they've got to see him some time—"

"Or write," Tommy suggested.

"Write! Write the details of a plan like this! Do

use your intelligence. One of them will see Dawson and give him letters to the others and let him start on ahead so that he is planted there.

"The question is, where is 'there'?"

"Goodness knows," said Tommy, gloomily. "A lonely place by the sea. With islands, I suppose, as he tried to swim ashore. Simply stacks of islands in the world, you know. And it's got a current. There are cartloads of currents knocking about on the map.

"We don't know what continent or hemisphere, or which end of the atlas to begin."

Mogridge reflected. "I don't think," he mused, "that it is very far away. From what you said I got a sort of impression that not very much time has passed between this attempt at escape or suicide or whatever it was and now—"

Tommy brightened. "You are quite right," he said, "I remember his words exactly, 'A few days ago, just before I started—' And the whole way they talked—but even so—"

"Good," Mogridge interposed, "good, so far. Now, what else? Was there anything else?"

"Oh yes," cried Tommy eagerly, "it looks bleak and barren—"

"A lonely place," Mogridge recapitulated, "within a few days' journey: looks bleak and barren but is interesting to botanists. I say—do you *know* any botanists?"

Tommy shook his head. " 'Fraid not—but my Uncle has a whole shelf of botany books—"

"Not much use to us," said Mogridge, "the descriptions were too vague."

"But they are *good* books," Tommy insisted, "and I really think they might help us. You see, they have got life-sized coloured pictures of all the plants there are in the British Isles."

"But we don't know 'there' is in the British Isles."

"We don't know that it isn't," Tommy maintained, "and it may be. Quite easily. They are coloured pictures. We could hunt through, and when we find a very rare little yellow thing three inches high with flowers the size of a pin and a very rare blue thing with leaves like grass both growing in the same place on a bleak and barren coast the chances are we have found the place we want. And if we don't find it, we'll know it's somewhere else."

"Meanwhile," Mogridge suggested, "it might be safer to get out of this."

Tommy wondered whether it might not be possible to climb up some other way to the lady's bedroom window and ask her to supply a little useful information, but Mogridge was quite decided that the risk was too great, and insisted that there was no hurry.

"Only," Tommy complained, "suppose we lose them. Suppose they do a bunk—leave here to-morrow and go somewhere else."

"They won't do that," Mogridge declared, "they won't take her about any more than they can help. After all, she might give them the slip. They will probably wait here to see Dawson—"

"Not if Dawson lives on the way 'there,' wherever 'there' is," Tommy objected.

"Well, then," said Mogridge, "what about giving the whole show over to the police?"

"Oh, no—" Tommy was thoroughly alarmed. "No—I say, we simply can't do that. Don't you see—?

"I mean to say—if you know what I mean and all that—but if you'd heard the way he said, you know that it would be the worse for her brother—and that the trouble was that he couldn't—when she said he could kill himself. And if you'd seen how she looked in the train, all over frozen sick and stiff with fright. The police would go and arrest someone, you see—that's their job, after all, I suppose, and all that. These fellows must be wanted for all sorts of things. (I am sure the beast with the buttery voice is. He'd murder his grandmother for the gold stopping in her last tooth, if you know what I mean.)

"And the girl is most awfully keen on this brother of hers—and he sounds a jolly sort of kid, you know. And he's going to get it, you see, if they think there's any sort of police work on the job. And if we are just going to make an almighty hash of it—"

"Hush—" Mogridge whispered, for he heard a door open above.

Tommy crept to the keyhole. The two men were coming downstairs together.

"I'll send word to-morrow," he heard, "then they will be ready for him. Don't do anything till you hear from me. Keep her indoors."

Daly made some answer in his low growling voice, and the other laughed softly.

"Well, if this fails, you and Putnam can try your strong measures. I'm afraid you'll only kill him, but as we have to do that anyway, I don't know that it matters much."

He could just see them as black shapes on the landing.

"Don't talk of failing," grumbled Daly, "we can't afford to do that. He will tell us when he sees he must."

One of the black shadows shook its head. "He has reasons for not telling we don't even guess, at least so it seems to me. If this fails we will have to wear him out. Break his nerve slowly. It will take time, and we may kill him before we get what we want."

They parted on the landing where they had met. Daly went back upstairs, the other straight on down. Tommy presently heard the front door open and shut.

"Right," he told Mogridge, "there is no hurry. Let's get out of this."

They dropped into the yard, scrambled over a few walls and out into a dreary back lane.

"Rum place," Tommy commented, "wonder where we are."

Mogridge had kept his sense of direction. "We want to go on this way as straight as we can."

They walked rapidly through gloomy and deserted streets.

Presently Tommy sighed. "In the books," he said, "some things are so jolly easy. There is always some fellow—a friend or an office boy or a Chinaman or—well—some sort of a fellow anyway—who isn't anything much in the story you know, but who can be left about to watch a place like that, and do it quite nat-

urally, sort of, without starting the others off thinking. Now if you or I were to loaf all day about that street, or sit perpetually drinking in the bar opposite—"

"There was no bar opposite," Mogridge interrupted.

"Well, that's just another instance. In the books there always is. But what I mean to say is, if we hung about watching the place no one would believe we were *real* —now would they?"

Then suddenly brightening, he went on, "But I say, couldn't we hire someone—some sort of out-of-work or down-and-out that was keen on a job you know—just *any* job—to do it for us?"

Mogridge shook his head. "No," he said, "if that kind of thing is to be done it is far better done by professionals. I think we'll have to go to them unless your botany books give a great deal more help than I expect. But I say what about your uncle?"

"I must write him a note," said Tommy. "Must think of a good, sound, convincing watertight kind of an excuse if you see what I mean. Because I'm cutting office for a day or two. Come round and see me early tomorrow. We'll have a bite of breakfast together and then get busy.

"But I say—I know this street. I've got my dimensions at last. I mean my whereabouts. 'I this way, you that way' as Shakespeare says. I'm sure a little shut-eye will do us both good, don't you know? Come early tomorrow."

When Mogridge arrived next morning he found Tommy up—alert and cheerful.

"I've written to the old uncle," he stated gaily. "Thought at first of saying I was ill—sudden seizure or something. But, then, you see if I did, he's a friendly old bird, and would certainly buzz round to see how I was bearing up. Then I thought of saying that my sister in Dinard had wired, 'Awful trouble, come at once.' Or, 'Harry eloped with waitress, please come immediately—' Harry's her husband, and an awful ass, between you and me. What a girl sees—"

"Did you?" Mogridge interrupted with a shade of anxiety in his voice.

"No," Tommy confessed. "I sort of suspected it might lead to something or other, you know. But I had to say something. You see, if we rescue the lady and her brother and catch these blighters, he'll be most almighty cheered at the whole show. In fact, he'd much rather I saved a lady's life than turned up punctually at the office—"

"Why not tell him the truth," was Mogridge's suggestion, "he could probably help us. After all, we aren't attempting anything disgraceful."

"No," Tommy agreed, "we aren't, and that all sounds very nice, but you just don't know my uncle. It would simply put the lid on. Hay would be just utterly and completely dished—not a chance of survival—if my uncle got on the job. He'd just be so dead keen on bagging the criminals he'd be ready to use his best friend —his mother, or his aunt—as a bait, let alone a fellow he's never even heard of. He'd ring up the police at once, and bust the whole show. Then Hay would be murdered, according to plan, and my dear old uncle

would murmur sadly—'Poor chap. What rotten luck. But it was worth it after all, to catch a set of scoundrels like these.' And he would just go on happily about law and order and a menace to society, and all that sort of rot, you know, and expect that poor girl—and Hay himself too, if he happened to know about it, to be most awfully bucked at his success."

"Then what have you written to him?" Mogridge asked.

"Oh, well, I've just said, quite simply and straightforwardly that I'm most awfully sorry I can't possibly roll up for a day or two, and that I'll let him know all about it when I can. I can't do more than that, can I?"

"Well," Mogridge answered cryptically, "you know your uncle, I don't. But how are we to look at his books?"

"Too easy," was the reply. "Just ring the bell and walk in. He'll be safe in the old office till lunch time. The servants all know me. Look as if he had sent me for something. He sometimes does. No hurry though, yet. By the time you get to be my uncle you don't have to get up as early as he makes me."

They finished their breakfast, and sat for some time talking.

"He'll be gone now," Tommy said presently. "Regular as clockwork, his movements."

They went at once to the uncle's house and rang the bell.

"I say, I want a book out of the dining room," said Tommy boldly. "Rather an understatement, that," was his comment, as he took the nine volumes of Sowerby's

"English Botany" from the shelf, and laid them on the table.

"Now, what exactly are we looking for?" Mogridge asked.

Tommy repeated rapidly, "A rotten little yellow thing, three inches high, with flowers like pinpricks—" he paused, and looked puzzled and uncertain—"Pinpricks, was it, or pinpoints? Pinpricks? Pinpoints?"

"It doesn't matter," said Mogridge, "what else?"

"That's all that one. The other is, 'an attractive blue affair'—*little* blue affair—? Can't remember whether he said little or not—an attractive blue affair with leaves like grass. Let's begin at opposite ends. Here, I'll take Vol. I., you try the last. We'll go straight through, I forwards and you backwards. If you see a picture at all like either, stop at once, look at its number and read up about it. See how rare it is and where it grows. It must be rare, he said so. No good finding dandelions and forget-me-nots."

They each took a volume, and were soon absorbed in turning over the pages. Tommy checked for a moment at a blue larkspur. "It's blue and it's attractive," he said. But Mogridge assured him that the leaves, which were not shown in the picture were not in the very least like grass.

"But listen to this," he read out, " 'Sisyrinchium Bermudianum. Blue Sisyrinchium. Leaves narrow, grasslike.' Grasslike, you see. Just his word—'in boggy places, very rare. Perianth very delicate in texture, deep blue within, nearly white outside. In boggy places, very rare. In several places about Woodford, Galway. . . .

Near the police barracks at Rossmore . . .' Those two places, Woodford and Rossmore, are the only ones named."

They put in a marker and went on.

A few seconds later Mogridge stopped at scilla verna —vernal squill.

" 'On sandy pastures,' " he read out, " 'and on ledges of rocks near the sea coast.' "

Tommy shook his head. "*Vernal* squill. Vernal means spring. He said he saw one lately. No vernal squills knocking round in September, you know."

They went on turning over the pages. Tommy put a marker in at "Brassica vimea," small sand rocket, which was said to grow only in the Channel Islands, and his hopes were raised by Draba aizoides; which was found in Glamorgan, but on reading further he was disgusted to see that the draba flowered in the spring.

Mogridge went slowly. The volumes that fell to his share gave him a good many pictures which it seemed worth reading up about, but nothing he thought it necessary to mark. He finished volume seven about the same time that Tommy finished four.

"Here's six for you and five for me," he said. "We're practically through. We want a blue thing in the Channel Islands or else a yellow thing from the West of Ireland."

"We don't know that it's in the British Isles," Mogridge reminded him.

"Good guinea-pigs!" sighed Tommy. "Have we got to do this for the whole of Europe?"

Volume five, which fell to Tommy's share seemed to

deal almost exclusively with thistles, daisies, dandelions, ragweeds and groundsels, while volume six offered Mogridge a set of handsome and conspicuous campanulas and heaths and then settled down to a series of pink centauries.

"Little and rotten, but pink," he murmured, looking at Cicendia pusilla, then he turned the page and ejaculated "Good Lord!"

One simply could not doubt it. Tiny yellow flowers, each perched on the end of a stem as delicate and rigid as finest wire. Rotten and little and yellow—three inches high, with flowers like pinpricks, and yet, by the very force of its aggressive oddity a flower that would not allow itself to be overlooked. Insignificant little weed—and yet even a man in a hurry, even a man intent on crime, might notice it, if only to remark how little and insignificant it was.

"This must be it," said Mogridge. "Simply utterly must. 'An upright plant, with threadlike stems two to eight inches in height' . . . And look at the picture. How's that? Pretty rotten."

"Rotten," Tommy agreed.

" 'Rare,' " Mogridge went on, " 'In damp places in sandy bogs. Confined to the counties of Cornwall, Devon, Pembroke, Dorset, Hants, Sussex, Glengariff and Cork in Ireland.' "

"Ireland," Tommy murmured, "I say—that blue one—Sissy—you know. Where's Glengariff? Anywhere near Woodford?"

"Fetch an atlas; we'll have a look."

"It's rather an old one," said Tommy, "but it marks practically everything anyone ever heard of."

"Cicendia grows at Glengariff and Cork," Mogridge recapitulated, "and Sisyrinchium at Woodford and Rossmore."

"Funny they should both be Sissies," Tommy commented thoughtfully. "Sissy with an S is blue, and Cissy with a C is yellow. I shall call them Blue Sissy and Yellow Cissy."

Glengariff they found on Bantry Bay; Woodford in Galway was far inland, but Rossmore, in County Cork, was only about five miles from the sea, and about half way between Cork and Glengariff.

"My mittens!" said Tommy, "just look at all this coast. Just look at all these islands! It'll take us something like a busy lifetime to begin to think about it."

He went to the shelf, and took down a small green book.

"The Student's Flora of the British Islands, by Sir J. D. Hooker," he said. "No pictures, but there may be something in it. Look here—here's the Sisyrinchium. 'Bogs, Galway and Kerry.' Doesn't mention Cork. Kerry begins here, quite near Glengariff. That gives us all this bit of coast, and about a mild million more islands. Well, we haven't wasted our time."

"Certainly not," Mogridge agreed. "We have eliminated the whole of England, Scotland and Wales and about three quarters of Ireland."

"But not the rest of the world," said Tommy gloomily. "These books only talk about the British Isles. . . ."

"But I say," cried Mogridge, "look here—there's a bit more over the page. 'Distrib. Arctic and temp. N. America. Mr. Wynn assures me that this plant is truly wild in Kerry' . . ."

"Read it again," said Tommy. "What does it mean?"

"Distrib.—distribution—where it's found you know."

"You mean Blue Sissy is *only* found in Ireland and America?"

"Yes, Arctic and temp. N. America."

"Then the place we are looking for *must* be in Ireland. America is too far off. All the same we can't go searching all round all the islands all over Kerry and Cork."

"We've precious little to go on. It's a lonely place, he said. Well, this map marks quite small villages. Look here—Glengariff Hotel quite separate from Glengariff, so we can take it that wherever nothing is marked for an inch or two we've got a pretty lonely stretch. And we want an island near enough to the shore for a good swimmer to think he might swim ashore."

"Well—about how far is that?"

"Well, some people swim the Channel," Mogridge suggested.

"Twenty-one miles. The dickens of a way. And Leander and Byron both swam the Hellespont— 'When young Leander swam the Hellespont'—I don't know in the least how far that is."

"Meanwhile," Mogridge interrupted, "I think it would be a good thing to have these people watched."

"Good Lord—how?"

"Professionals. Sort of people who make a living

finding out whether husbands are really at the club or wives really shopping."

Tommy wasted a good deal of time on books about Ireland and on books about botany that told him nothing he wanted to know. He was beginning to feel discouraged, and to wonder how many miles of barren, lonely, much indented coast he would have to search before he found Hay.

Pity he should die, with a sister like that so keen on him. Besides—there was something about him—something about the way they had spoken of him. He would be, Tommy thought, worth knowing.

Like his sister, so they had said. He remembered her voice. How angry she had been—how magnificent! And how quick she was. Quick and clear.

"A plucky kid," that beast with the voice had said, "worth two of her."

He remembered the discouraging look of the coastline of Western Ireland. Somewhere Hay was waiting, on one of those black, specklike islands. Actually now, he was there. Now this minute, helpless—in danger.

Tommy almost wondered whether it would not be sounder in the end to go back to 49a Queen Elizabeth Place and risk complete disaster in an effort to hear more. But 6.30 was the time for that. It could keep until the museum shut, for even in Queen Elizabeth Place one could not balance on window ledges in broad daylight.

At last, however, a persevering use of footnotes and bibliographies resulted in the discovery of a useful, unpretentious series of books, each giving a list of plants

found in one county with, if they were rare or local, further particulars of their especial habitat.

He filled in his forms, and before long received the volumes dealing with the maritime counties of Western Ireland. He glanced over the names and saw that one was missing. The volume dealing with Kerry was already in use.

Tommy's heart bounded with a sudden wild irrational conviction that this was the one and only volume he needed. He got up and wandered slowly round the outer shelves as if looking for some book of reference, every now and then stealing a glance at the readers in their seats.

Sure enough he saw him. There was the man he had seen through the curtains of that upstairs room, the man with the smoothly pleasant voice which had thrilled him so unpleasantly. Surely the leading spirit of the whole concern!

"Mustn't stare at him," thought Tommy. "Mustn't look as if there was anything up."

He was reading a small book bound like those which lay in Tommy's place. "Getting up enough botany to look probable and intelligent," thought Tommy. "That puts Cork out of the picture, it's only Kerry he's interested in. That just about halves the coastline—but it leaves us the worst bit."

In order not to seem eccentric he went back to his place, and pretended to read through utterly unappetising and unintelligible lists of Latin names.

"All botany books ought to have pictures," he thought, "I could read this all day and be none the

wiser. Oh, Lord, what have the harmless flowers done to deserve such names as these? Anthoxanthum odoratum! Alopecurus geniculatus! Help!"

When he thought he had sat there long enough to give an air of probability to his behaviour he returned all the books and went to the nearest bookseller.

"I want something about Kerry," he said, "botany, geology—all that sort of rot you know."

He found it hard to convince the polite assistant that what he really needed was something dry and technical, not "Picturesque Rambles in Western Ireland," but at last he managed to buy a book exactly like the one he had seen in the museum, and some good detailed maps. Then he bought a child's box of coloured chalks and went back to the museum. He did not return to the reading room, but settled himself on a seat outside it, among marble personages and carved vases. There he began to study his treasures. The superabundance of islands dismayed him, the long stretches of lonely, much indented coast appalled him. One might go, perhaps, with a knapsack and pretend to be on a walking tour. Probably one would hear then of the eccentric botanists who frequented the place. At least one might if one got near enough, but it would take years, yes years, to skirt all those deep, jagged inlets separated from one another by apparently uninhabited ribs of mountain.

He turned to his botany book and searched for mention of Sisyrinchium bermudianum and Cicendia filiformis. He hunted the places mentioned on the map, and underlined them with blue or yellow chalk, according

to whether the blue or the yellow cissy was found in them.

By the time he had finished it was getting towards six, and people were beginning to come out of the reading room. He folded the map, shut the book, put the yellow and blue chalk back into its box, and put each into a different pocket. He had hardly finished when the man of whom he was thinking came through the door and walked past him quickly.

"No good trying to follow him," thought Tommy. "Be certain to give the show away."

But yet so many people were leaving the museum that it seemed safe enough to go so far. Outside the artist, as Tommy now called him to himself, hesitated on the pavement.

"He's thinking whether he'll go by bus or train," thought Tommy. "Or else which bus or which station is best."

But at that moment an empty taxi passed, the artist stopped it and got in. Tommy ran forward and was in time to hear, "Paddington Station."

Again Tommy's heart leapt. "He's going to meet Dawson's train," he thought, "if I go along I may see Dawson and get some idea of what he looks like." Even to himself he dared not own the extravagant hope that he might overhear something useful.

Then he felt in his pocket and realised that he was suffering from his chronic disability. After a diligent search he fished out a shilling, a threepenny bit and a handful of coppers. What a fool not to have borrowed from Moggy!

Well—there was still the underground.

It was a bad moment, however, people were crowding out of offices and shops and trains and buses were beginning to fill up. Tommy was not used to the British Museum station. He mismanaged his changes, failed to get into crowded trains, and generally wasted time one way and another, growing every moment more exasperated at his own incompetence and the perversity of things.

At last, hot and breathless and sick at heart he got out at Praed Street. It was a forlorn hope, but after all Dawson's train might be late, and there are far worse places for discussing guilty secrets and avoiding observation than a crowded railway station. And then alone, hurrying to catch the train, he had just left, he saw the man he had been following. The interview was over. They had separated.

Before he could make up his mind what to do the train had gone, leaving him on the platform. For a few seconds, inwardly and earnestly, he cursed his luck and his stupidity, then he decided that as he was there he might well do worse than enquire about trains for the west of Ireland, in case at any moment it became necessary to plan a move at short notice.

As he passed the booking-office he saw a youngish man with a beard and glasses taking a ticket. Evidently the clerk did not hear what he said, for he repeated with some annoyance, "Inchkall—Inchkall—" and spelt it aloud. Apparently there was still some difficulty, for he asked: "Then what's the nearest place I can book through to?"

Inchkall! Tommy knew the name at once. It was marked in yellow on his map, for the yellow cissy grew there. Also he had noticed that it was the terminus of a small light railway in the extreme west of Kerry.

Inchkall! Dawson! This must be Dawson taking his ticket. The "artist" had come not to meet Dawson's train but to give him a few last instructions—perhaps the letter to Castle—before he went.

Tommy's brain reeled.

"Dawson must grow a beard!" that was only yesterday. They had got a move on with a vengeance!

Bitterly he realised that "I'll wire to him 'Don't shave' " was a joke. Actually a joke! Dawson must be wearing a false beard.

The earnest seeker after truth in any form loathes the intrusion of a joke, and this seemed to Tommy a peculiarly loathesome specimen, for it had convinced him and Mogridge that they had at their disposal at least as much time as it would take Dawson to grow a beard.

Joke indeed!

Good heavens, when did the train go? He had no money for a ticket. Could he anyhow get at Mogridge? They had arranged to meet at his club, perhaps—probably—he was there already.

He ran to the telephone. It seemed an age, and he was nearly weeping with exasperation before he heard the hoped-for voice, and then— "Oh Moggy, come here quick and bring enough money for two tickets for Inchkall in West Kerry!"

"I'll bring all I've got," Mogridge answered, "but the bank's shut—what's up?"

"Oh never mind," Tommy wailed. "Come quick—quick."

He waited in a fever. If Mogridge did not come what should he do? Get a platform ticket, jump into the train and trust to luck and inspiration? Luck and inspiration without money or a ticket would never get him onto the boat—would never land him at Rosslare.

No, if Mogridge did not come he must let Dawson go ahead, must wait and follow.

And then to his unspeakable relief Mogridge appeared.

"He's here on the train," Tommy whispered. "Dawson himself in a beard and glasses on the way to Inchkall in West Kerry."

"Which carriage?" Mogridge asked. "Find out and I'll get the tickets."

Tommy looked at the clock.

"Can't do it," he panted, "no time. Booking-office is about half a mile away."

"All right. Platform tickets—the train."

They ran alongside, looking into the carriages.

"Here!" cried Tommy, and they jumped in.

A young man with a beard and glasses looked up as the door slammed behind them.

## CHAPTER VII

### INTERLUDE

[*Note.* This chapter is entirely without incident and may be skipped by anyone not interested in the mental progress of the people concerned. On the other hand, if it is not read their subsequent behavior may appear unaccountably exaggerated.]

For none of the three on the island did time pass pleasantly after Hay's second attempt at escape.

Putnam lived in daily dread that Hay would contradict his story of having acted in self-defence throughout. "If he does," he tried to reassure himself, "it's only his word against mine, and he has told enough lies since we caught him." But yet uneasily he knew that if Hay produced his version of that encounter on the cliff, Castle would believe him, and so, for that matter, would Sefton.

He had always hated Hay from the moment he had seen him, hated his insolence, his obstinacy, his helplessness and his unconquered spirit. But now his instinctive antipathy was strongly reinforced by righteous indignation.

Hay had deliberately tried to kill him. First he had attempted to drop a stone on his head; then he had stood waiting in the shadow of the cliff. Worse still, he had treacherously shammed unconsciousness not with any

hope of saving himself but simply—gratuitously—in order to drag Putnam to death with him.

Worst of all he was still alive, able to contradict Putnam's improvised tale of self-defence—and contradicted nothing, but lay staring wearily at the window, while Castle said in a worried voice, "I'm sure I don't know what Sefton will say about all this."

Besides, Putnam was a heavy man, and had been badly shaken. It was little comfort to his bruises to know that Hay's hurts were worse than his own.

Castle was terribly worried about it all. He was afraid Putnam might come in one day and murder Hay out of spite and revenge, and then when Sefton came back there would be the devil to pay. Even as it was he would come in for a good share of blame, he knew. He could imagine Sefton's scorn, "What did you imagine he wanted to go into the other room for?"

Yes, he had been a fool, that was the truth of it, to let Hay coax him like that. It would have been so easy not to have done it, and then none of this would ever have happened.

Meanwhile he was finding the society of Putnam, whom he had never liked, more and more repugnant. Putnam dared not touch Hay again, but his hatred must have some outlet, and it revolted Castle's gentle and timidly decent soul to hear him describe in detail what he would like to do or to see him threaten the helpless and suffering boy.

As for Hay, he was fretted by pain and boredom, and borne down by a sense of powerlessness and failure. At first he surrendered himself to his misery, scarcely

speaking, staring for hours at the little window, making no response to Putnam's spite or to Castle's timid kindness. He was sick with passionate, desolate longing; not homesickness, for he had never had a definite settled home, but a need that was like hunger and thirst for sunlight and air and open grassy spaces where he could move as he pleased. The little window, the sounding sea outside, the soft, everlasting rain and the cry of the gulls mixed with his weariness and pain to make a crushing load of wretchedness under which for a while his thoughts lay still.

But this passive state could not last long. Soon his restless mind had found a new problem, and was busy again.

To make Putnam hate him and Castle love him was to drive a wedge between them. There could be no harm in that. The more Castle liked him the more he was disgusted by Putnam's brutality; the more Putnam loathed him the more he despised Castle's weakness. The natural dislike between the two ripened under Hay's attentive care into an active, positive hatred. Soon he began to take a real interest in the game and to plan gentle, unobtrusive ways of setting one against the other.

Then one night his thoughts took a fresh turn.

"Castle likes me. He is not frantically keen on the money; in fact, he'd sacrifice it to get me out of this. What keeps him in place—in with the others? What hold has Sefton over him? Not gratitude, not love, not a sense of duty—only fear. Well, fear of what? Why is he afraid of Sefton? Not as I am of Putnam, that he will punch his head. Why? Why?

"If I could find that out—if as I suspect it is some knowledge Sefton has of his past, it might be a thing I could use if I could lay my hands on it."

He redoubled his attempts to be charming to Castle. With endless patience he led him on to talk, hoping to find some clue.

And Castle found his society far pleasanter than Putnam's, enjoyed learning to play chess, and wished that fate had decreed they could be friends, or that he could forget how their companionship must end. Hay never spoke of that again, he knew too well that it was unnecessary, that the dread of it lay deep in Castle's mind, and that Putnam would never allow him to forget it.

In one way both Castle and Putnam found life easier than before. It was quite obvious that Hay could make no further attempt at escape for the present, and it was unnecessary to guard or watch him. He was often left alone for hours while they fished or bathed or even occasionally visited the mainland. And now too he was so completely helpless that Castle had no hesitation in moving him to the front room downstairs which faced the lonely, misty, rockstrewn sea, but consequently was far lighter and more airy than the rooms at the back, whose tiny windows opened straight onto the cliff.

Days passed in this fashion without incident, and every day Castle was helplessly aware of the growing tension between himself and Putnam, and between Putnam and Hay. Hay was aware of it too, but it suited his purpose to aggravate it in every possible way. Only Putnam seemed unconscious that the situation was changing. He did not realise that what drove Castle out

onto the shore in the rain was the mere necessity of resting his nerves from the frantic irritation caused by the possibility of seeing Putnam or hearing his voice and the knowledge that he was under the same roof with him.

"When is Sefton coming back?" Hay asked Castle one day.

"I don't know," was the perfectly truthful answer.

Hay smiled. "There'll be hell all round when he does," he said, then added mischievously, "how long can you keep up the pretence of my health being so precarious?"

Castle turned quite pale. "I say—" he faltered, "you won't tell him that—will you?" The chance shot had told.

"Why should I tell him?" Hay asked. "Why on earth should I? Only tell me this—I'd like to know—of course I'm not feeling well now, but then—when you told him that—was there *anything* the matter with me?"

"Yes, of course there was," said Castle, blushing uncomfortably.

Hay laughed, long and softly. "Precious little, considering all things," he suggested.

"Well—" Castle agreed. "Well—considering all things. But," he went on anxiously, "you won't tell Sefton that, will you?"

Hay sighed. "I'm afraid," he said, "Sefton himself may soon begin to see that I am pretty tough after all."

Castle blinked sadly at the pale, smiling face. "Yes," he murmured, "I am afraid he may."

"Good old Castle," said Hay warmly; "it was very decent of you."

Castle looked awkward. "It was all true," he protested, "strain and fatigue and all that."

"All true," Hay echoed, half mocking, half affectionate, "all true—only slightly exaggerated."

"Well—yes—perhaps," Castle conceded, then added anxiously, "but you *won't* tell Sefton—will you?" And then defiantly, "and you *were* run down and it *had* affected your heart."

"My heart—oh, Lord," Hay murmured, "hang my heart! I daresay it will last my time—almost—with care. But it was jolly decent of you, Castle, and I won't tell Sefton." Then in a lower, warmer voice "And I won't forget it either."

Why, why was Castle so afraid of Sefton?

Then one morning Putnam called Castle aside after going ashore for letters, and Hay knew that there was something in the wind.

"Sefton coming back," he thought. "Sefton coming back, and they are not telling me. That means something to be sprung on me."

Suddenly he felt sorry for himself. It was hard that with this everlasting, grinding pain against him he should be called to meet a stronger, keener intelligence than his own. It wasn't fair. Sefton coming back—the long dreary battle to begin again. He wished he could die.

"But I'd never do it without the proper tools," he reflected. "No use imagining I would or could."

And then he laughed again.

"Sefton's a match for me in most things," he thought, "but not in obstinacy. I beat the world at that."

He knew that at the first encounter something would rise up in him, and to fight would be as natural as to breathe. All the same he felt very tired, and wished it need not be yet.

He wondered now if he could risk a lie. It might give him a little time, and a little peace.

But no, it was safer not. They might question and confuse him, and some part, some hint of the truth might slip out. He had no idea how much or how little they knew, and he would be almost certain, if he answered their questions at all, either to produce a story they would not believe or to tell them something they did not already know. This blank assumption of ignorance was safer.

Besides he was not one to ignore unpleasant possibilities, and "I don't know" was a thing one could cling to in the last stages of panic, pain or exhaustion, whereas one needed all one's wits to make and sustain a good lie.

Now Putnam was clearly in a bad temper and Castle seemed happier than he had been for some time. That meant that the thing was to be a trick, that they would try to get the secret from him by gentle means. He wondered what they would try this time. Would Sefton dress up again?

Hardly—for everything had been in his favour the time before, the darkness, Hay's exhaustion and excitement and all the circumstances. Having failed then he would not try the same thing again.

Often he could hear them talking in another room, evidently discussing the scheme not too good-temperedly, but listen as he would he could not distinguish their words.

One evening they had been out together. It was high tide, and he heard them landing the boat almost under his open window. Sefton's name was mentioned more than once, and he was maddeningly tantalised by the conviction that they were discussing the new plan for making him tell his secret. Their voices were distinct, but by no frantic effort of concentration could he disentangle their words from the dull, insistent murmur of the waves on the shore.

Putnam was grumbling and growling. He made out the words, "If he'd let me I'd soon—" and he guessed that he was complaining that their methods were too gentle. Castle's answer was in sharp disagreement, he could catch the tone of annoyance but not the words.

Then again he distinguished "His sister" and a horrible fear struck him cold.

Cecily—his sister. He did not know that they were aware of her existence, but if they were, if they got hold of her, a terribly simple and obvious line of attack was open to them.

"It's not certain," he reflected, "they may not have been talking about me at all."

He strained himself to listen, but only caught a meaningless word here and there. They had lives of their own, these people, whom he considered only in relation to himself. They might have been speaking of someone

else. Only in his heart he was certain that they were not, that they were talking of him and of Cecily.

Cecily—it was too easy—too obvious—inevitable, if once they realised her existence. That was their line, clearly, necessarily. She must be growing anxious about him. A message:—"Your brother sent me, he is ill—" Oh, too easy, far too easy!

But was Castle's cheerfulness consistent with that?

It was, it was; for Castle, who did not know what absolute and imperative reasons he had for keeping silence might easily imagine that at a threat to her he would yield.

Well, would he? That was a question to be faced. Would he? They would stop at nothing—Putnam and Sefton—to gain their end. If at any point he would give in to save his sister—if there was anything he was not prepared to see them do—better yield at the start, before they hurt or frightened her. Putnam—if Putnam should be allowed to touch Cecily—

All that night he lay awake, his mind working in a fever. But in the morning he was calm again, for he had taken his decision.

"Cecily's got to take her chance," he thought. "After all, why not? It's what she would wish if she knew all the circumstances. Why should I expect her to be readier to give away her friends than I am mine? There's not that much difference between us. Cecily goes with me—only, mercifully for her, she hasn't the extra worry of knowing something she must be careful not to say.

"Yes, Cecily goes with me. I'll be hanged if I mean to consider her more than myself."

To him in this mood Putnam entered with his breakfast.

Castle brought him his food as a rule, he having half jokingly complained that the sight of Putnam destroyed his appetite.

The restless, sleepless night had left him more haggard-looking than usual; his blankets were thrown about, everything to do with him looked dishevelled and untidy. It was sickening to Putnam to see him there and to realise that he dared not touch him. So easy to hurt him, and yet he dared not do it.

And Hay felt that he had already deliberately thrown his sister to that brute, for with him decisions weighed like accomplished acts. He simply looked at Putnam, turned away and shuddered. Quite naturally he did it and involuntarily, but no planned, deliberate insult could have been more effective.

"You little beast," said Putnam savagely, "you wait."

"Oh, God, I am waiting!" cried Hay half hysterically. Then somehow mastering himself he added, "You will catch it when Sefton comes back."

And Putnam simply dared not throw the teapot at him, simply loathed him and dared do nothing. He set the tray down beside him and went away.

"Don't ask me to do anything for that little reptile," he said to Castle, who was staying in bed with a slight bilious attack, "unless you want me to smash him."

Castle sighed, and thanked heaven that Dawson would soon be there.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SUBSTITUTION

As the train moved out of the station Mogridge leaned forward and spoke:

"It's all up, Dawson," he said quietly, "your friends at 49a Queen Elizabeth Place are being watched. They can be caught at any moment if we give the word, and if you make any trouble we shall hand you over to the police at once. We quite understand that this may lead to Hay being killed—personally, I don't care two straws if it does, never having met him—but if he is you and the rest will most certainly be involved in a murder charge.

"Putnam and Castle may possibly get away, though I think it's unlikely, but you and Daly and the other fellow won't stand a chance."

Tommy stared in open-mouthed astonishment at Mogridge, and then turned to see the effect of the words on Dawson.

Dawson sat rigid, frozen. He had raised one hand in his first start of surprise, and had not let it fall again.

"I—I—don't know—what you mean," he stammered.

"I think you do," Mogridge insisted, "I want your false beard and your letter of introduction."

"But—but—"

"It's no use denying anything," Mogridge pursued, "you see that. You see we know too much. If you try to warn your friends or give trouble in any sort of way the police get you and them—that minute. As I say, your friends are watched already, and you can't get away now unless we choose. At present, however, so far as I know there is no murder charge against anyone, and if things fall out as we wish I don't see why the police need come in at all, or why anyone need be much the worse.

"My idea is that you and I should get out at the next stop and hire a motor and proceed to my utterly undesirable country residence at Piddlington, while my friend with your false beard, glasses, letter and ticket, goes on to Inchkall in your place.

"As you see we know enough to go straight to the police at any moment, but we have reasons of our own for not wishing to do that."

Dawson had turned quite pale. For a few seconds he did not answer, and then he faltered, "You are making a mistake. You are taking me for someone else. You must be mad."

"In that case pull the communication cord and appeal to the guard. It's dangerous travelling with a madman—two madmen. But if you do we shall tell our story—exactly all we know—your friends at 49a will be involved. And it is dangerous travelling with a false beard and that letter in your pocket."

Dawson's frightened eyes searched Mogridge's face, and he said quietly, "I don't understand—you can do as

you like, but you won't rescue Hay. He'll be killed at once if—"

"If he is killed," Mogridge interrupted, "you will all hang for murder; not that I care much if you do."

Dawson stared hard, fascinated.

"I don't understand," he repeated, "I don't understand what you are after. What do you want?" he whispered, "what is your price?"

"Your beard, your glasses, your letter of introduction and your railway ticket," Mogridge answered readily, "also any information we happen to want about your plans and instructions."

"I'll give you all the rest," Dawson's voice was scarcely audible, "you are two to one and could take it by force if you chose, but not information—I'll not give you that."

"Will you come with me and give no trouble?"

Dawson nodded. "Glad to. And I could always say you kidnapped me by force."

"Very well," Mogridge conceded, "you can say that to your friends if you like."

"But," Dawson repeated, "I'll answer no questions. He'd know I must have told you."

"We'll consider that," said Mogridge graciously, "and talk of it later. Meanwhile just hand over those things."

Dawson took down his bag and opened it. Some sudden instinct made Tommy call out, "Be careful—don't trust him."

"I don't," said Mogridge, but it was Tommy who sprang on him as he drew his hand out of the bag, cry-

ing, "Quick, Moggy, help me. I can't hold him—he's too strong."

Between them they got the pistol from him after a short struggle.

Mogridge was rather annoyed that it was Tommy who had first seen and averted the danger. Consequently he spoke sharply to Dawson.

"That was a fool's trick," he snapped, "I'd been led to understand you were no fool. We'd better have your bag and everything in it."

Dawson shrank back into the corner, his eyes wide, his face blankly despairing. Tommy felt almost sorry for him.

"Now, Tommy," Mogridge went on, "you must go because you are so much more his build and colouring. If anyone has ever described him to Castle or Putnam they'd see that I wasn't him at once. Of course I know exactly where you are going and I won't lose sight of this fellow or the others. I'd like to come with you. I'll follow you as soon as I can. Send me any news there is, I'll arange for someone to see it if I have started before it arrives. Don't hesitate to call in the police if you need them. If they come without your doing so you'll know someone has given trouble this end. Don't worry if they arrest you with the others. Just try to keep them from massacring Hay. It doesn't much matter if they do, but it would look well for you to prevent it.

"Now, Dawson, get on with removing your beard. I've no grudge against you, none against anyone. Only I want you out of the way while my friend gets a move on."

"What is it you want?" Dawson asked, "not to punish criminals—not to rescue Hay—"

"That's all by the way," said Mogridge grandly, "we don't mind doing those things as well.

"Now, look here, you seem to be a fairly sensible sort of a fellow. Your game is up and ended. If Tommy gets into trouble there will be worse trouble for you and all concerned. It would be much better for you and for everyone if you told us a little more. Just answered a few easy questions."

"No—no—" said Dawson decisively, "I'll give you nothing you couldn't have got from me by force."

Mogridge looked at him severely. "I don't mind telling you," he said, "that if anything goes wrong with my friend here—he's not Hay, you see, and I do know him—it will be worse for you and your friends at number 49a—not to speak of those on the island near Inchkall. Now, wouldn't it be wiser to give him a few hints as to how you will be expected to conduct yourself, where you will be met; what your plans are, and so on?"

Dawson was very pale. "I'll not do it," he said. "The letter and all that you could take by force. I'll give you nothing you couldn't."

"One ideaed sort of fellow this seems to be," Mogridge commented; "we got the notion he was intelligent, didn't we? Don't quite follow him here."

"I do," said Tommy unexpectedly, "he hates the whole show, but he's mortally scared."

Dawson started at that, as a man does who suddenly hears his name called by a complete stranger. His start

seemed to say "How did you know?" and gave him away completely.

"And I'm not surprised," Tommy went on, "that fellow with the voice is a thing one might easily be afraid of."

Again Dawson said, "I don't know what you mean," and his voice was thick and strange.

Mogridge was often as much bewildered by Tommy's occasional flashes of intuitive observation and insight as Tommy was by Mogridge's quickness of decision and action, and was often made a trifle uncomfortable by them.

"We mustn't waste time chatting," he said, and began to examine the contents of the bag. "Good, here is the stuff to fix the beard—keep your eyes on him, Tommy—here are some papers that may be interesting too. Better turn out his pockets as well."

"But I say," Tommy put in nervously, "what am I to do?"

"Just keep your eyes on him," was the indifferent answer, "while I run through his things."

"I know. I don't mean that. I mean, do you really mean to get out at the next station?"

"Yes, and drive home. I've got to see he doesn't send word to any of the others. You? Why you just carry on. Pretend to be him. I'm sorry I can't swop jobs, but to begin with I couldn't wear that beard with my coloured hair—and to go on—"

"But I say—" Tommy protested in a panic, "I'm not good at that sort of thing. I never can think what to do in an emergency, and you always know. Couldn't I

get out too and come on by the next train when we have talked things over a bit?"

"Not on your life!" Mogridge exclaimed. "If you turn up when and where you are expected there'll probably be someone to meet you. The whole thing will be easier, and you will be far better able to hide how little you know of what you are expected to.

"Good Lord, Tommy, you're not going to funk it, are you?"

"Oh, no," said Tommy bravely, and then added uneasily, "no, of course not."

"You'll take all ordinary precaution," Mogridge went on. "Leave word where you are if you go anywhere unexpected. I'll come or send as soon as I can, but I've got to see this fellow doesn't warn anyone or make trouble."

Then Dawson spoke in an odd, constrained voice. "Could you manage," he said, "to keep me literally shut up till—till— It wouldn't be bad if I could be put under arrest for some sort of crime. Like burglary or picking pockets, or something."

"I don't know," said Mogridge carefully, "we could see."

"Or perhaps," Dawson went on, "you could lock me up in a cellar till—till—"

He paused so long that Mogridge asked, "Till when?"

Tommy answered, looking at Dawson, "Till he feels safe, I suppose. Safe from his friends. I think in his set they aren't very kind to failures."

Dawson caught his breath sharply and looked at Tommy. Then he turned to Mogridge. "Well," he said evasively, "for some time anyway."

Now the train began to slow down, and Mogridge said suddenly, "Here we are. We get out here. Good luck, Tommy, I wish I could come too."

And Tommy answered fervently, "I wish you could."

It gave him an unfinished, unprotected, almost undressed sort of feeling to be acting alone.

"What shall I do if I get in a fix?" he thought dismally. "I never know what to do till it is too late—and often not then."

He didn't even feel he could put on the beard convincingly, so he slipped it back into the bag. If he had had any idea what his reception would be like, or what he would be expected to do, he could think out some sort of plan of action.

He was to be "planted" there. Presently the lady of the latchkey would be given a chance to confide in him. But probably Daly and the other man who knew Dawson would come along with her—he ought to get Hay to escape before that. He would see Putnam and Castle—he was taking a letter.

Here it was, sealed and unaddressed. That would probably tell him something. But ought he to open it? He could not without damaging the seals. Of course he could put it in another envelope and stick it up—but perhaps that slimy voiced brute always sealed his letters like that and they would suspect something.

Oh, why wasn't Mogridge here? Moggy would know what one ought to do.

In books one would in some patent unexplained way have got the seals open undamaged. But perhaps one could? Why not? Slip them off with a sharp pocket

knife—just scratching off a thin layer of paper—then melt the underside of the wax with a match and put them on a new envelope.

But perhaps if it didn't match the paper they would suspect—

No, no, one must risk that. Information was absolutely essential.

This is what he read:

Dear Castle,
Here is what I promised you with full instructions.
Yours G. S.

Tommy read it over and over again. Clearly it was written in guarded language so as not to give information if it fell into wrong hands. Heavens, why couldn't Mogridge be here?

It told him nothing. He read it again though he knew it by heart. "With full instructions—with full instructions." There was no sign of instructions among the other things he had taken from Dawson. Then suddenly he realised the meaning of the words, "Here is what I promised you, with full instructions."

The instructions had been given verbally to Dawson. Consequently he would be expected to tell them the whole plan. That might be a difficulty, it might also be a convenience. He might be able to get Hay away before the others came back. Mogridge could see to it that the girl was all right.

On the other hand, they would expect him to know endless things of which he had not the faintest idea, and he would have to walk most carefully.

Night came and the train pounded on in the dark. No place is more conducive to gloomy thoughts and anxious speculations than a railway carriage after nightfall. The embarkation at Fishguard somewhere about 2 o'clock in the morning did nothing to raise Tommy's spirits.

He slept a little on the boat, an uneasy, restless sleep, full of dreams which were merely irrational and exaggerated continuations of his waking thoughts.

Next day the sight of pleasant and unfamiliar country cheered and distracted him somewhat. After all, it was no use worrying, for no amount of worrying would tell him what he wanted to know.

Early in the afternoon he changed at a quaint little country town onto a single-lined light railway that meandered in casual fashion along roadsides, through farmyards, and then for miles and miles through lonely moorland country, dark with heather, sprinkled with stones and half-hidden by a soft, grey drizzle. The air was full of the smell of the sea, and now and then between rocks and through breaks in the clouds one had a glimpse of grey water.

Tommy took out his map and examined it. Inchkall was inland and stood fairly high, near where the road and railway crossed the long ridge which was the backbone of the peninsular down which they were travelling. Below it but yet not on the coast was the little village of Aunas. A lonely coast, indeed, all the few habitations in the district seemed to be inland. The nearest place that seemed to take any account of the sea was Glenerris, and that was on the opposite shore, across a

long, narrow inlet, so that though it was within easy distance by boat the way by land was long and extremely rough. But what interested him most at the moment was that from the high-cliffed headland that terminated the long peninsular a trail of rocks and tiny islets was thrown out into the sea within easy reach of both coasts. No buildings were marked upon them, and past doubt, past any doubt at all, Hay was hidden on one of those lonely islands.

Inchkall seemed to be a mere figure of speech. There was neither village nor station in sight, only a little shed beside the railway. Someone shouted 'Inchkall!' the train stopped and Tommy got out.

Just behind the shed a pony and cart were waiting. As no one else had left the train Tommy could only suppose they were waiting for him. Then a thin, grey-haired man, came forward and hesitated.

"All right," said Tommy boldly, "I have my beard in this bag."

The man laughed nervously: "I'm glad to see you," he said, "it's getting beyond me," and then anxiously, as though he had said too much too soon, "You have a letter, I believe?"

Tommy handed it to him and from his manner in reading and the fact that he made no comment he concluded that this was Castle, not Putnam.

"You are Castle, I suppose?" he asked.

"Yes," said the other, "yes. Putnam is over on the island with him.

"I hope," he added nervously, "they won't be mur-

dering each other. It's getting beyond me, it really is. He tried to escape again—"

"Yes," said Tommy rashly, "I know. They told me."

"Told you!" exclaimed Castle with a scared look. "How told you? How did he know? I hadn't written—he knows everything. Oh, well, then, you have heard what happened. It was Hay's fault in a way. He should not have tried to kill Putnam—he really shouldn't.

"Escape is all very well. I don't blame him for trying that—but all this violence—all this feeling— He forces it so, and it only makes it worse for him in the end."

Tommy wished he had not interrupted so hastily, for this did not seem to correspond at all with the story he had heard, and any sort of information might be helpful.

"You must have had your hands full," he murmured sympathetically.

"Full—I should think so. But now you are here, what are your plans? What do you want to do first?"

"I think," said Tommy boldly, "that first of all I should like to see Hay."

"Yes—yes. In that case we'll keep out of the way. He thinks, you see, that we are both ashore. I suppose you know how to account for being here, and what to say to him?"

"Oh, yes—all that—" said Tommy quickly, praying that he might not be pressed for details.

"And don't forget," Castle went on, "that we have orders to act at once if we suspect any attempt at rescue

and he knows it. So be careful or you will make him suspicious."

"We'll have to look out," Tommy agreed.

Castle sighed. "Orders to kill him at once if we suspect any movement towards a rescue from outside. Kill him at once, bury him, and get away ourselves. And he knows it. He knows it, poor kid."

Tommy laughed. Their plans seemed specially designed to clear his path.

"It's rather up to you to make yourselves scarce, then, while I am about. You see, it's like this: the idea is that I should arrange a rescue and escape, and all that rot. Sham, you know. Just take him somewhere where we can get him back again—but let him think it real."

They got into the cart, and while they drove towards the shore it was impossible to talk of any but general matters because of the nearness of the driver.

Tommy remarked on the rain, on the wildness of the scenery and on the large number of ruined cottages they passed.

"It's like that all over," Castle told him. "There used to be a much larger population. Emigration, you know. Nothing for them to do here. Barren—remote—no possibilities.

"Our island was inhabited once by a few families of fisher people, but they all left or died off. The last of them, they say, went mad and murdered his wife and children about fifty years ago."

"Good Lord," said Tommy, "what happened? I mean, what did they do?"

"Oh, nothing," said Castle, "nothing that I ever heard

of. He just went mad. The loneliness of the place, I suppose, and the incessant noise—sea—wind—gulls—I suppose it got on his nerves. Then one night there was a great storm, and he got up and murdered the lot of them."

"Good Lord—you don't say so! But what became of him?"

"Oh, he just stayed on there, I believe. No one seemed to bother about him much. You see, he never left the island, and no one else had any occasion to go there. I suppose it seemed no one's business in particular. I don't know, but I daresay his wife had no near relations. He just stayed there all by himself on the island and lived on fish. That shows you rather the kind of people they are. He didn't interfere with anyone, and they all just kept out of his way."

"But what became of him—is he there still?"

"No one seems quite sure he isn't, but as a matter of fact he must be dead. He wasn't young when it happened—"

"Good Lord—"

"Besides if there was anything about on the islands we'd be bound to know it."

Tommy shuddered. After all, among fishers and farmers fifty is not young and yet one hears of individuals who live to a hundred.

"We've got his cottage," Castle went on, "it's the only one left. I don't altogether wonder it drove him mad."

At last the cart stopped. They got down, left the road and followed a track through the heather. Finally they scrambled down a steep cliff path to the sea.

"You'll find Putnam somewhere about," said Castle. "Here is the letter, you had better show it to him."

On the sand a little boat was lying. "Shall I land you?" Castle asked, "or can you manage? I have to fix up with some fellows here."

"Thanks, I can manage," said Tommy, who feared that unless he went alone he might be forced to interview Putnam before seeing Hay. And his need of Hay was becoming urgent. There was so much he needed to know before he went too far with the others. For Hay could tell him all sorts of things that it was most essential he should know if he was to play his part with any faintest chance of success. Hay could tell him what it was all about, and what these people were wanting to find out. He could also, most probably, help him to formulate some sort of a plan of action, a thing completely impossible in his state of utter ignorance.

"Well, I'd best be off," he said cheerfully, "it's that largest island of the group, I suppose?"

"Yes, that's it," said Castle, "and you get in between it and the smaller one south of it. But are you sure you'll be all right? Shan't I come too?"

"Don't bother."

"I think perhaps I'd better."

"Oh, don't worry—" Tommy felt that the risk of drowning was preferable to the risk of being found out. And if he was not to be found out he must have a quiet talk with Hay before he unfolded any plans or answered any questions.

"But no, I think I'd better land you," Castle went on fussily, "as you don't know the coast or the currents."

Tommy was afraid that too great an insistence on his part would rouse Castle's suspicion. He was obsessed by the haunting dread of all those who play a part—the dread of not appearing natural. He agreed, "Perhaps it would be better."

"I'll have to come back," Castle went on, "but I'll just land you first."

"I suppose," suggested Tommy, "that Putnam will see me. You must need to keep a pretty sharp lookout."

"Oh, you'll find him all right," was the answer. "He's very fond of fishing. He'll be somewhere about. You see, we don't have much to fear from this side. Aunas and Inchkall are both inland, it's only at Glenerris you can hire a boat, and this is the only place for miles where you can land safely on this side of the bay. Then, of course, we get warning of strangers or anything suspicious or unaccustomed. Men in our pay, you know. It's that I am waiting to see to. Important to pay your helpers regularly."

"But aren't you afraid they'll give you away?"

"Oh, no—they are not like that. They are always on the side of—well how should I put it?—against the side of law and order and police. Of course they don't know what we are up to. They think we are smugglers or political refugees or something illegal, but yet—well—the sort of thing they rather like and admire.

"So as I haven't managed to meet them all I think I'll come back, if you don't mind, as soon as ever I have landed you. Even so, I shan't be in till quite late. You see, we buy eggs from one and milk from another and vegetables from a third, and the money we pay them for

looking out all goes in with that, so that no one suspects anything.

"I'll be glad to get you over there. You know, I don't like leaving Putnam too long alone on the island with Hay. They do get on each other's nerves. (At least I believe Hay does it on purpose.) And yet I have to sometimes, or else leave Hay quite alone, and I like doing that still less—even now. Of course I know he can't get away, but heaven knows what he may be up to. He is the sort of fellow—the sort of fellow who would burn down a cathedral to toast half a slice of bread if he felt that way."

Tommy felt certain he should like Hay.

## CHAPTER IX

### MEANWHILE

DAWSON gave no trouble at all. Mogridge almost wished he would. There was something odd—uncanny almost—about his passive, silent obedience. If he had attempted to bolt, if he had protested or resisted, Mogridge felt one would know where one stood. As it was, was he biding his time? Was he thankful to be out of it? Or was he simply confident that his friends would see through Tommy without help from him.

Mogridge explained to the ticket collector that he and his companion had nearly missed their train, but had jumped on board at the last moment without tickets, and he paid the fare for both, and asked the way to a garage where he could hire a car.

He thought hard as they walked, for up till now he had had no leisure to make plans, and he had a very definite and peculiar problem to deal with.

The average English country house is not fitted up as a prison, and even if it were the average English servant requires some explanation before consenting to lock a guest in the cellar. There was nothing wrong with the servants in Mogridge's home at Piddlington. As servants go nowadays they were rather good. Still the fact remained that to secure even their benevolent

neutrality one would have to tell them something—true or false—and to secure their help (which seemed positively essential) one would have to tell them a good deal.

Dawson had suggested some arrangement by which he should be arrested by the police for burglary or picking pockets. That sounded plausible enough if really he was afraid of his associates, and only wished to be safely out of the show; but if his fear was assumed and he was only waiting for an opportunity to warn them it might be difficult to stage such a thing convincingly without giving him a chance of escaping or sending word. Also it involved leaving him to tell the police or the prison authorities whatever tale he might choose after his arrest.

At last Dawson spoke, in a subdued expressionless voice. "What are you going to do with me?" he asked.

"You'll soon see," said Mogridge.

He hadn't himself a notion, but the question was exactly the stimulus his brain required. The next moment he saw it all plainly.

He could drive Dawson to Piddlington and give out that he was a friend of his who had had a serious breakdown, and must not be left alone too long. A few hints would be enough to make the servants look upon him as a madman.

Dawson would realise that he was watched and suspected. One could even behave in such a way as to make it appear that the gardeners and so on were not merely what they appeared to be.

A few words to Hodgekin that Dawson could not

catch—a meaning nod—a murmured, "Smart fellow that!" Dawson might easily be made to think he was in the hands of some well organised association.

Mogridge wasn't sure whether he himself should pose as some kind of a detective or a rival criminal. But perhaps it did not matter much. After all, that was not the kind of thing he could be expected to explain.

But to keep Dawson quiet was not enough. Tommy—no use ignoring that fact—had gone into real danger. Someone must go to his help—and quickly.

Mogridge began to wonder who there was he could take completely into his confidence and either send after Tommy or leave in charge of Dawson. He had been out of England for a long time, and could not think at the moment of any acquaintance sufficiently trustworthy and intelligent who was immediately available.

Dawson seemed quiet and cowed—but what if he were simply trying to give that impression, and waiting an opportunity to telegraph to Putnam or Castle so that Tommy would walk unsuspectingly into a trap?

Police? The idea suggested itself, as it had often done before, but Tommy had seemed convinced that an appeal to the police meant death to Hay; and now Tommy himself was involved in Hay's fate, for he would never stand by and see deliberate murder done.

Tommy's uncle? That was more tempting still, for surely he would not treat his nephew's danger as lightly as a stranger's.

Then Dawson spoke again, as they drew near the garage, "Where are you going to take me?"

Mogridge answered, "I told you already—my unde-

sirable and incommodious country residence at Piddlington. If you give no trouble, you won't find any."

It struck Mogridge though he was not very observant, that Dawson looked queer. His face was pale and rather blank, and he spoke dully, almost without moving his lips.

"Should you mind," he suggested, "not taking me straight there?"

"Good Lord," said Mogridge, rather taken aback at the request, "what do you want to do? Shop on the way?"

Dawson shook his head. This was no joking matter for him. "No. But I thought if we went somewhere else and changed cars I might be less easy to trace if—if—"

"I see," Mogridge said quickly, for Dawson's suggestion had given him an idea. He remembered suddenly that a friend of his, Bill Stretton, who had stayed on in the army after the war and gone to India was on leave, and that his family lived about thirty miles away. Bill he remembered as a quick-witted adventurous youth —the very helper he needed.

"All right," he said, "I'll take you another way and borrow a friend's car to go on in.

"I shall give out that you are ill," Mogridge announced, when they were settled in the car and had started off, "and when I get you home you'll just go to bed and stay there. I shall take away your clothes, and if you try to escape my people will stop you. If you should succeed in evading them we shall go to the police. I don't deny I'd rather not, but I've nothing like *your* reasons for wishing to avoid it."

Dawson nodded, then muttered, "I lost my head in the train."

"I know you did," Mogridge retorted; "I distinctly noticed it."

"I'll give no trouble," said Dawson; "I'll pretend to be as ill as you like."

"He looks bad enough for anything," Mogridge thought, for Dawson's face was grey and he was shivering though the day was warm and he had on a perfectly adequate coat.

Once or twice he seemed about to speak, but when Mogridge asked "What is it?" he answered, "Nothing—nothing," and seemed to shrink back into himself and grow smaller. The car ran on rapidly and easily along smooth main roads. It seemed to Mogridge that Dawson was growing paler every minute and his face had an odd set look.

"I say," he asked, "are you all right? Are you well?"

"Quite well, thanks," Dawson answered mechanically.

It was a great blow to Mogridge to find that Bill was away visiting friends in Yorkshire and that there was no one in the house but his mother and sister. They were pleased to see him, gave him a warm welcome, assured him Bill would be sorry to have missed him and begged him to stay for some food.

He lied bravely and convincingly, told a swiftly improvised tale of an invalid friend who must be taken home without delay and of a hired car that gave nothing but trouble—borrowed from the two trusting ladies

enough money to pay the driver and a small two-seater of Bill's in which to continue the journey.

"But is he fit to go on?" they asked, looking at Dawson's haggard face.

"Must get him back quick," Mogridge whispered. "He gets these attacks. Must get him back to his own doctor. No, it's not dangerous, only beastly inconvenient."

"But it's so late," they pointed out, "wouldn't it be better to spend the night here? He doesn't look fit to go on. We could put you both up."

But Mogridge was firm, and so with thanks and good wishes and expressions of concern, they parted.

Mogridge thought, as he drove how very awkward it would be if Dawson should turn out to be really ill, and should have to see a doctor, also that the question of a helper was still unsolved, unless indeed he decided to confide in Tommy's uncle.

"Is it much farther?" Dawson asked presently.

"Not much, not more than an hour or so. But why? Aren't you all right?"

They had left the main road now, and Mogridge was forced to slow down, as the light car bumped and bounded down country lanes in the dark.

Dawson shuddered without answering. Mogridge asked again, "Are you all right?"

"An hour or so," Dawson whispered to himself—"an hour." Then suddenly he said, "He is a devil, kill him like a snake."

"What do you mean?"

"A devil—a devil. I lost my head in the train."

The road was improving now as they reached the outskirts of a small country town, and they were running faster between high-walled gardens. "A devil," Dawson repeated, "kill him, you must kill him. I'll tell you more. I was afraid. He gets hold of one, you know, but now it's safer to tell you the whole thing."

"You might have thought of that sooner," said Mogridge, remembering Tommy's danger.

"I know, I lost my head."

"Is he mad?" Mogridge wondered nervously, with a side glance at Dawson's drawn, ghastly face.

"I'm not in this because I like it," Dawson went on. "No more is Castle. Only when a devil like that gets hold of you—but look here, I'll tell you about him. Out there, you know, he's a great man, has quite an organization. Here, I suppose it's different."

Mogridge glanced at him again and decided he dared not interrupt the current of his speech to ask questions, one might put him off altogether, for he was talking not as though he had deliberately chosen to do so but as though driven by the irresistible force of some emotion, as though momentarily scarcely sane. Dangerous then, if one wanted his information, to check him, to risk bringing him to his senses. Better to listen and hope later on to make something of it.

"But out there he is a great man. He pays well too. Shares profits. But he gets hold of one. Generally people who are in trouble. Pretends to help, really does help in fact, but expects in return—like the devil, you know—one's whole soul. And gets it. And if he ever knows I've helped you get at him! He has enough

against me, only I have against him too. But unless you catch him I can't prove it."

His speech was growing incoherent, his face was colourless. Mogridge instinctively slowed down.

"Are you all right?" he asked again anxiously.

Dawson seemed to pull himself together. "Right—yes—all right," he said, "but can't you go a bit faster? I am—perhaps I'm not awfully well. Get there quick."

"All right," said Mogridge, "it's not many minutes now."

"Many minutes," Dawson repeated, "many minutes." He went on speaking in breathless, disconnected jerks. "Well, I was telling you. He helps people who have done things that—who have got into trouble. Really helps. Daly really likes him. Only, then, you have to do what he wishes and he has no scruples. This business about Hay, well, it didn't look too bad to begin with. And now—now whatever I do, he'll not believe I didn't let him down. So why not do it? Why not do it good and thorough?"

"Why not?" Mogridge assented.

"If you don't get him and kill him—I'll pay—as your friend said—for my failure. And I tell you this. Your friend has gone into worse danger than you think—"

Actually while he was speaking, Dawson snatched the steering-wheel. Mogridge resisted furiously but in vain. He had one moment of wild terror as the car swerved, the next instant he lost consciousness in the shock and crash as it charged a wall.

His head ached. It was dark, but somewhere, far off,

there was a faint light, and something moving and subdued, meaningless sounds, rustlings and whisperings.

"What's happened?" he asked.

A tall dim thing out of the darkness stooped over him.

"You have had an accident," it said, "your car ran into a wall."

Mogridge groaned. He could not quite remember, but there had been some fear, some terrible urgency. It must be a hospital. There were other beds with things asleep in them. Yes, the tall thing beside him was a nurse.

"Don't worry," it said, "don't try to think. It will all come back."

But there was something odd, something inexplicable and unnatural—something that troubled him. And then suddenly he realised what it was.

"It's dark," he said, indignantly, "why's it dark?" He was perfectly furious. It certainly had no business to be dark. It was coming back now in fragments, incoherent, dreamlike, sinister, distorted. Tommy in danger, that was the urgent, terrible thing. Tommy in danger. And he had to do something about it. Dawson—Dawson was in it, somehow, and a blue flower and a yellow one. Forgetting much that was essential, he could yet remember their names—Cicendia filiformis and Sisyrinchium bermudianum. But Dawson—yes—that was it—Dawson must not be allowed to telegraph—because—because—because Tommy was in danger.

"Where's Dawson?" he asked.

"He's in another ward," said the nurse. "He's all right, but you mustn't try to talk."

"Don't let him send a telegram," said Mogridge excitedly, "promise me he shan't send a telegram."

Soothingly, reassuringly, the nurse promised.

The sun was bright on the walls and beds, he had slept, and woke bewildered. Someone said something about feeling better now—or better soon. Certainly he didn't, probably he wouldn't. And slowly he began to remember.

"Has Dawson sent any message?" he asked.

"Not yet," he was told, "he's not properly conscious yet."

"Oh, thank the Lord," he sighed; "look here, you must telegraph." It was a desperate remedy, but also a desperate need. He gave the name and address of Tommy's uncle.

"Say anything you like about the accident," he said, "but say this from me, 'Come at once, Tommy in danger.' " Seeing a startled look on the nurse's face he added quickly, "That's nothing to do with us, neither of us is Tommy; Tommy is his favourite nephew; we were on our way to tell the old man about him. It's very urgent. Let it go at once."

It happened that the name and address of Tommy's uncle were sufficiently well known to inspire confidence.

"It's urgent—terribly urgent," he added imploringly.

Yes, urgent it was. Tommy had walked into a trap—and he—Mogridge had promised to send or follow immediately and here was a whole night gone and part of a day. Simply hours and hours. What was it Dawson had said? "Worse danger than you think."

"I mustn't worry," he thought to himself, "it's very bad to worry if you have just had a bad knock on the head."

"Mustn't worry—"

"Worse danger than you think."

And Dawson must not be allowed to send a telegram. When he tried to think how he could most shortly and clearly tell Tommy's uncle exactly what had happened he found his mind wandering among complicated irrelevancies.

Hay would be murdered if one told the police. Then, of course, Tommy would too. And there were two flowers—a yellow and a blue. His head ached, but he mustn't worry.

At last he heard a strange voice saying: "I couldn't understand the telegrams. Where is my nephew? And who has had an accident?"

"Oh, thank the Lord, you've come, sir!" cried Mogridge with unceremonious eagerness.

He flung the essentials of the story at his hearer as best he could, but long before he had finished his head ached so vilely that his mind was confused and it seemed utterly essential that the uncle should know the names and appearances of the two plants that had provided a clue.

"Cicendia filiformis is yellow, very small and upright, and Sisyrinchium bermudianum has long grassy leaves and pale blue flowers, like hanging bells," he insisted, and he would not rest until the uncle had repeated both names correctly.

"Cicendia filformis and Sisyrinchium bermudianum.

Now don't bother yourself any more. You've told me everything, now leave it all to me."

Mogridge looked at him, square-built, stoutish and middle-aged, and somehow found his appearance reassuring.

"And now," the uncle said, "I'd like to see this Dawson if he's up to being seen."

He was taken aside and told very quietly that Dawson had died about two hours before. He felt a passing curiosity as to whether Dawson's last act had been attempted escape or deliberate suicide.

"He was conscious for a few minutes," his informant went on, "and wanted us to send a message to someone called Elizabeth Place, but did not tell us the address."

"What was the message?" asked Tommy's uncle.

" 'Have done my best,' " was the answer. " 'Serious accident. Unable proceed.' "

Tommy's uncle frowned and restrained an inclination to remark, "Better dead," for by that message he gauged Dawson's character. Shifting and unstable, utterly incapable of choosing a line of action and holding to it. "Probably suicide," he thought, "afraid to face the consequences of any line of conduct that presented itself to his imagination. Better dead."

And then he turned his thoughts to more urgent and more practical matters.

"I think you will find he is easier in his mind, now he has told me," he said, "but I will send someone he can talk to in case he gets worried again. He is quite likely to remember something he ought to have said.

What time did you bring him in last night? What—the night before last? Unconscious twenty-four hours?"

He frowned and looked at his watch. He could catch the night boat, but even so he travelled forty-eight hours behind his nephew. A great deal might have happened in the time.

But Mogridge slept with a mind at ease, and from that time made steady progress.

## CHAPTER X

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

"THERE'S the cottage," said Castle, quite unnecessarily as they drew near the shore. "Hay is in one of the front rooms downstairs now. The back rooms are all very dark and stuffy, being so close under the cliff, and there's no fear now of his escaping. I'll shout for Putnam. No—I'd better not, perhaps, if you really want to see Hay to-day. He might hear, and he'd better go on thinking Putnam and I are both still ashore.

"I'll land here—that little bay—it's the easiest landing. Putnam will be somewhere about. Probably on the other side of the island. I'll just row round and give him a call if I see him. It's not so easy to reach the other side except by water, it means going up the cliff, and that, as you see, is pretty strenuous. At least I find it so—Putnam often does it twice a day.

"Here's the front-door key. One of the top front rooms is ready for you if you want it. Of course I don't know what your plans are."

"I think," said Tommy boldly, "I'll see Hay first as I'm here and he's here and he thinks you and Putnam are both ashore."

"Yes—why not?" Castle agreed.

"He's in a hurry," Tommy added significantly, "says he wants to get a move on."

Castle nodded. "In that case better not have the key. Wouldn't look natural. Perhaps you could climb in at the window.

"Well, I'm sorry to leave you like this. I'll tell Putnam you are here and warn him not to burst in."

"That's right," said Tommy, "it would be the dickens if he came in and found me chatting to Hay. So hard to explain why nobody killed him."

Castle went back into the boat, and Tommy climbed up onto the window ledge. It was late afternoon, drizzling and dusk. The room inside looked dark. It seemed unfurnished except for vague heaps and masses of no particular shape. The window was old and badly fitting. Tommy slipped in his pocketknife and pushed back the latch, and then began to raise the sash.

At this point he became aware in the darkest corner of the room of a pale face and black eyes, watching him expectantly, but without curiosity or surprise.

Hay was lying on a mattress with rugs thrown over him. Instead of pillows, he had behind him a pile of seaweed covered over with a sheet. The ghost of a smile that had died of suppression in its cradle haunted the corners of his mouth, contradicting the tragic seriousness of his dark eyes and the strained weariness of his whole face.

"Pray come in," he said, in a cool, slow voice. "Come right in and sit down—if you can find a seat you like."

Tommy scrambled through the window and dropped onto the floor. He could see better now that he was in

the room. His first thought as he looked at Hay was, "How like his sister," and his next, "No, by Jove, how different."

He had the same dark eyes—tragic—resentful—dangerous—but his face was more finely built—sharper—cleaner—the features at once clearer and less emphasized. It was colourless too, and sunken, and the dark rings round his eyes made him look brooding and sullen even while he smiled.

"I say," Tommy began, "your name is Hay, isn't it?"

"Yes," was the answer, "it is. Though I can't imagine how you guessed it. So many things it might be. What can I do for you?"

The question sounded absurd in the circumstances, and was evidently meant to be so. Tommy, always sensitive to atmosphere, was aware of intense nervous tension under the coolness of Hay's deliberate speech; and he was puzzled by a sense of unaggressive, watchful hostility in his manner.

"Near the breaking-point," he thought, without exactly knowing why—then he remembered certain phrases he had heard. "Getting sick of the show. Frightened, badly frightened," and then, "He is a plucky kid, when all is said."

Meanwhile Hay was looking him over still with a half smile, still with unfriendly, resentful eyes that made him feel small and ridiculous.

"Yes, I'm Hay all right," he said, "but I can't imagine how you guessed my name."

"Well, it's like this," Tommy began awkwardly. "I happened to hear of the hole you were in. And I've

come to see if I can't get you out of it, you know, and all that. Help you to escape, you see."

There was a pause. Surely something was wrong. Surely Hay ought to be expressing more interest.

"Escape, oh good," he murmured, "anything for a change. Have you brought an L. C. C. ambulance or what?"

"Good Lord," cried Tommy, startled, "can't you walk?"

Hay shook his head.

"What!" Tommy exclaimed, "not at all?"

"Not at all," said Hay, looking amused and somehow unfriendly.

"Holy snakes!" cried Tommy, "that's a blow!"

"Not a blow," Hay corrected him coolly, "a fall. I fell roughly from the top of the cliff to the bottom (very roughly part of the way) and broke one arm and one leg. I was hoping to escape. Didn't they tell you?"

"No," said Tommy, "I thought you tried to swim."

"Tried," Hay assented, "so I did. But that was a different day. Well, it's jolly to see a fresh face. Of course I don't believe your story of wanting to help me. I've had too many funny tricks played on me to believe that. If I did I might be more excited. Only, I say, what will you do to prove the goodness of your intentions? One fellow brought me a cold chicken and a bottle of whiskey. As they were starving me just then I simply loved it. He hoped I'd get drunk and say more than I meant to. I got drunk all right—very drunk—so drunk that I went sound asleep and slept for hours. I'd been having a rotten time and hadn't slept for days—or

nights. It did me more good than I can tell you. But they aren't starving me now. Castle says it isn't good for me. Decent old stick, Castle, isn't he? Honestly tries to make life bearable for me until the utterly inevitable end—which is about all anybody can do for any of us, isn't it?

"But don't let what I say discourage you if you happen to have any cold chickens about you. Have you? Castle's idea of catering, though wholesome, I'm sure is very monotonous. Have you any whiskey?"

"No," said Tommy, quite bewildered, "only some sausage rolls and a pork pie which I bought off the station platform."

"Pork pie!" cried Hay. "What's that? I haven't seen a pork pie for years and years. And what must I tell you to earn some sausage rolls—you don't say how many—and half a pork pie?"

"But I say—" Tommy protested, "I do wish you'd be serious."

"Serious!" Hay exclaimed. "Serious! Oh, God!"

He laughed his strange, long, nervous laugh and Tommy felt he had never heard anything half so tragic.

"You see it's like this," he explained hastily, "Dawson was to have come and your sister was to have confided in him and he was to have pretended to help you escape if you see what I mean. But my friend Mogridge has got Dawson out of the way and I've bagged his letter and all that. Oh, that reminds me—ought I to stick on his beard?—well, now I'm here instead of Dawson and I mean to help you escape really—not

just pretence—only it's a bit awkward you having crocked up like that . . ."

He stopped breathlessly and suddenly dismayed by the cool scrutiny of those queer, dark eyes.

"Ingenious—very ingenious—" was Hay's quiet comment, "too ingenious. I'm afraid I don't believe a word of it.

"But look here," he went on, "you spoke of my sister. Where is she? What is she up to? Did you really see her?"

"Yes, of course I did," said Tommy, "you see, it's like this—she is afraid to do anything because they say they'll eat you—sort of, you know—if she does. But she was to be given a chance of speaking to Dawson, and Dawson was to . . ."

"Where is she?" Hay interrupted.

"Where? Oh, in London, at present, but she is coming here. They wanted her to write a letter, but she said she wouldn't do a thing unless she could see you."

Hay's face clouded. "Look here—it's a rotten show you are in. Dishonest—illegal—dirty—and heading straight for murder. Can't you somehow get her out of it? She's no use to you. The fact is, you see, I don't *know* the thing they keep asking me."

"That's not true," Tommy interposed.

Hay looked at him doubtfully and shook his head.

"Well—true or not—I can't tell any more than if I didn't. It's impossible. I can't do it. It's not a question of taste." He was trying to speak calmly still but his voice was husky, and quivered a little. Tommy noticed the

nervous movement of his hand crumpling the dark rug with thin, restless fingers.

"I can't. I simply can't, that's all." He was finding his voice difficult to control; it was growing jerky and breathless, his dark eyes, like those of an animal in pain, were fixed on Tommy in sombre entreaty.

"Don't you see then—don't you see—if they try bullying her—how damnable? I'm afraid—afraid of that. And useless, mind you—quite useless. For I can't tell—I—I don't know."

"Good Lord!" Tommy exclaimed.

Hay turned his face away and spoke rapidly, breathlessly. Tommy, fascinated, watched his fingers, which had found the fringe of the rug and were twisting and rolling it.

"It's not specially because she is my sister—any decent girl—you—you—if you have any manhood or decency in you—she's out of place in this sort of show among these people. Putnam—Sefton—good Lord!" He caught his breath with a sob, then turned and looked at Tommy with hurt, imploring eyes.

"Oh, if you want to help me—" he cried, "you say you do—help her. Get her out of it. Away. Right away. You will—oh, surely you see that you must!"

"Good Lord," Tommy muttered, "but what about you?"

"Oh me—" Hay answered, rather breathlessly, but quite quietly, "well—me—you can send the police after me, or anything you like. They won't find me—alive. They may dig me out of a hole and bury me somewhere else."

Tommy felt too utterly appalled to speak. Hay went on after a pause.

"I'd be glad—very glad—to think that. This place is getting on my nerves." He laughed and shuddered. "Silly—isn't it? But I don't want to stay here for ever. That's all you can do for me, even if you have come to help me. But if you haven't—even if you haven't—you'll try to look after Cecily.

"You don't look a brute, like Putnam or inhuman like Sefton. God knows how you got in with this crew . . ."

"I didn't," Tommy interrupted him.

Hay, with an impatient gesture, waved his protest aside. "Get her out of it," he cried. "It won't help your dirty game to keep her. She's done, for all the help I can give her. Don't you understand? Putnam—Sefton—they'll stop at nothing."

His voice broke, and he paused shuddering. It was hard to show something of his emotions without being altogether mastered by them.

"If I could save her," he went on unsteadily, "I could have saved myself. You don't believe I don't know. Well—believe this—you can—you *must—I can't tell.* Oh, God, I am human—how could I possibly have stood it all so long if there had been any possible way out. Look at me. Just look. Can't you *see* a little of what it has been?"

"Good Lord—" Tommy murmured helplessly, looking at him— "Oh, good Lord!"

"You can't save me," Hay went on eagerly in a shaking voice, "but her—Cecily—"

"Good Lord," Tommy whispered fervently. "Yes—I will. And you too."

"Oh, don't say me too," Hay implored him. "That spoils it. That makes me doubt the rest. Me too! Just think—*me*—how can you? Don't think I'm that much of a fool. But she—I've not seen her since you caught me—she knows nothing—is not dangerous."

"I wish to goodness," Tommy exclaimed indignantly, "you'd not insist on making me one of them. I don't want your beastly secret. I don't know what it's about or why they keep you here. And I don't care. As for what you know, you dashed well don't know anything about me or you'd not talk such rot. And if you did there's nothing about me worth repeating."

Hay laughed. "I don't know," he said, "even if that is true I don't see that you can help me much. I can't walk and you can't carry me far. And if it isn't you can still look after Cecily.

"You think, perhaps, I'd tell for her what I wouldn't for myself. But it's not like that. You don't understand. It's not a matter of whether I'd rather she suffered or I did. Ask me here, now, in cold blood, 'shall we destroy you or your sister?' and decency, convention, my upbringing and so on force me to say 'Me'. But we are past that—long past that. It's not a question of etiquette. It's not a mathematical problem. It's this—just this—I couldn't have stood it all this time if there had been any possibility of ending it by telling you. I don't believe anyone could. Certainly not me.

"More—or less—what's the use of more pressure

when already you have applied enough—more than enough?

"Can't you see? Can't you *see* what it has been?"

The nervous, eager torrent of his speech, his pale face, the pleading urgency of his manner, filled Tommy with strange, sympathetic dread. He did not know what had happened but he realised it was something terrible.

"You hoped you'd drown," he said in a low, horrified voice.

Again that long, queer laugh.

"Drown! I hoped I'd escape. I'd rather escape than drown. You don't understand. How can you? I'd give anything to live for half an hour away from this ghastly place, free and out of fear and out of pain. You think I want to die. I don't. Not here—now—like this." His voice rose to a cry of distress. "I want to get away—wake from this nightmare of fear and imprisonment and hatred. Oh, *then* die if you like—I'd not care—I'd not care then—"

He hid his face on his arm, and drew two or three long, sobbing breaths, then looked at Tommy again.

"Can't you see?" he cried, "that you are dealing with a neurotic sort of a coward? If I could save Cecily wouldn't I have saved myself?"

"Good Lord," said Tommy, "you are the bravest thing I ever heard of."

"Oh, don't say that!" Hay wailed, "say you will help that poor girl."

"I will," said Tommy solemnly, "I promise. But I still say 'and you too.' "

"Oh, if you could—" the words came like a moan of pain, "if you could make me believe for an hour that I was free and clear of it all."

"I will—you shall!" cried Tommy warmly. "Oh, why can't you believe me?"

Hay sighed wearily. "I don't know. You'd *have* to say all that. I don't know what I do believe. Not much in anything, I think."

His eyes wandered sadly over Tommy's worried, open face.

"But I think—yes—I *do* think—I do believe you are not altogether a beast, and see how utterly damnable it would be to drag her in."

"Well, I promise," Tommy repeated.

Hay smiled a quick, charming smile.

"Thanks," he said; "thanks. I'm a fool, perhaps, but I *do* believe you will try to look after her. It's your looks. You don't look like Putnam."

"Well, then," said Tommy hopefully, "you must help me. Just tell me everything Dawson ought to know. You see, I'm all in the dark. Who are you? Who are they? What's it all about? Why have they got you here? What do they want to find out?"

Hay's smile had faded. He shook his head. "Don't ask me questions," he said in a low voice, "I can't bear it."

"But I say—" Tommy began.

Hay interrupted him. "They nearly drove me mad asking me questions. 'I don't know—I don't know'—I just managed to cling to that—to repeat it quite mechanically if a fly woke me by settling on my nose. As I

believe good Mohammedans do the name of God. 'I don't know—I don't know'."

"But I only want you to tell me—"

"No, I'll not speak of it at all."

Tommy looked uncomfortable and apologetic. "I hate to worry you, and you've had a rotten time—I can see that. But, after all—I do want to help you—if you see what I mean. I know you don't believe in me altogether—but just sort of tell me the things I'd know already if I was Dawson. Whatever I am, where's the harm in that? I mean to say, either I know them already or I'd jolly well better—"

Hay drew his hand across his eyes.

"I can't," he said, "not just now. For one thing I don't know exactly how much you—they—do know already. Besides I might get confused and say more than I meant. It would be easy—so easy—to confuse me. I might say something that would give you a lead—might help you to something you want to find out."

He laughed weakly. "You see, I have already practically admitted that I do know. That doesn't worry me. It won't prevent me next time saying I don't, or denying that I ever told you anything of the kind. Still, I didn't mean to. It was a slip, and you are waiting for me to make another."

"Good Lord, Hay," cried Tommy, "you are the blighted limit. I only came here to help you—"

"Then get Cecily out of it and keep her out," Hay began wearily, but then broke off sharply with a little gasp, and looked at Tommy, as though some fresh idea had struck him.

"Oh, if I could trust you—if I could believe you—"

"You can—" said Tommy, "you really must—I say —I wish you would."

Hay stared at him with troubled, searching eyes.

"I daren't," he murmured, "I simply daren't—and yet—if I only could— "

"I wish you would—"

Hay's eyes seemed to grow larger and darker and to stare his through.

"I wish to goodness you would," Tommy repeated.

"I can't—I daren't. I'd have to tell you the whole thing."

"For God's sake trust me," Tommy urged. "You told me to look at you—well—just have a look at me. Do I look the sort of fellow—? I mean to say—" Tommy blushed confusedly and finished lamely. "Well, hang it all, they say you saw Dawson, am I so beastly like him as all that?"

"I forget. I don't remember what he was like. I hardly saw him. But—whether you are or not—" he shook his head.

"You have had a rotten time," Tommy went on, "it makes a fellow sick to think of it. But it's not that—I mean to say—"

"Listen!" Hay broke in harshly. "Putnam is coming back."

Indeed his heavy tread was just outside. Evidently Castle had not warned him to keep out of the way. Tommy glanced round for a place to hide, realising that to be found there would be most awkward all round. In the corner of the room there were planks and drift-

wood stacked leaning against the wall. He slipped behind them hastily.

Hay sank back against the pile of seaweed. Really he did not feel up to encountering Putnam just then. That is the worst of uncovering one's fear and distress, one is apt to see them too plainly one's self. It is difficult to use one's emotions effectively without losing control of them. Really he had forgotten how awful it had all been until he had seen the expression in Tommy's eyes when he had told him to look; he had forgotten how frightened he was until he had used his fear to rouse this stranger's sympathy. And now—now it was nearly too much for him. He wished to God he hadn't let himself go like that. Would he ever get control again? It was horrible now, this feeling of wanting to cry. Suppose—great heavens!—suppose Putnam came in and found him crying! If he lay still and shut his eyes perhaps Putnam would go away without speaking or noticing him much.

Tommy from his hiding place saw the door open and a tall, heavy, broadly built man come in carrying a lamp. He set it down not far from the door, then went out again and came back with a tray, which he laid on the floor beside the mattress.

Hay opened his eyes. A negative line of conduct never appealed to him long. He had had time to reflect, "This seems an impressionable sort of young fellow; whichever side he is on he may be useful to me over Cecily and possibly in other ways too. Certainly he is the kind that would dislike Putnam and his ways—he may as well have an exhibition."

"I say, Putnam," he said, "would you mind standing the lamp somewhere else? It shines straight in my eyes where it is."

Putnam stared. Unless you could call a muttered "Go to hell, damn you!" a request, this was the first request Hay had ever addressed to him, and under the civility of his tone he guessed there must lie a new, more subtle form of insult.

"Don't care if it does," he muttered; "if I had my way you'd not be complaining of lamplight in your eyes."

Hay laughed—he hadn't meant to—he had meant to madden Putnam without provocation that would be visible to Tommy, but he was tired out and his nerves not under control. Putnam hated to be laughed at. "Shut up, you little beast," he growled, "or I'll give you something to laugh at."

"You do," said Hay and laughed again.

At that Putnam lost his temper and kicked either him or the mattress on which he was lying, Tommy could not see which.

Hay caught his breath sharply and cried, "You clumsy brute; what d'you do that for?"

"Teach you manners," growled Putnam. "Like me to do it again?"

Hay answered, defiant and angry; "You can if you like. I can't stop you, and you know it."

"Oh, yes," said Putnam, "and I suppose you will tell Castle."

Hay was maddened by the jeering offensiveness of his tone. Really Putnam got on his nerves unbearably.

He answered hotly, "There is a lot I could tell Castle if I chose, and Sefton too." His manner was not so much a threat as a challenge.

"Well, tell them about that—and that . . ."

This time Hay gave a stifled cry and shut his eyes.

For a moment he looked so ghastly that Tommy thought he would faint, but then his colour came back, red and angry.

"Oh, goodness, I hope he's not going to check him again," thought Tommy, "I simply can't stand it if he kicks him any more."

"And shall I give you something else to tell him?"

"Curse you, you brute!" Hay answered in a whisper.

Tommy must have fidgetted—must have moved suddenly or awkwardly, for one of the planks fell with a loud clatter. Hay started and shivered, and Putnam turned sharply round. Tommy was petrified. He did not know what was going to happen but if Putnam saw him a situation that was already involved was going to become still more complicated.

To his surprise Putnam made no further investigation, but simply turned back to Hay. "Well, there is your tea," he said, with hatred in his voice, "you had better drink it."

And Hay was equally surprising, "What about the lamp?" he asked in an unsteady voice.

"All right," said Putnam, "where would you like it?" His attempt to make his voice sound pleasant succeeded in rendering it venomous.

"In that corner—near the wood.— Thanks . . ."

Putnam went out and shut and locked the door behind

him. There was a moment's quiet and then Hay began to cry.

Putnam's footsteps died away. Tommy came out from behind the planks.

"I say," he began awkwardly, "I'm most awfully sorry."

"Pour out the tea," Hay gasped between his sobs, "I'm—dying."

He knew he wasn't, and it wasn't what he had meant to say. The word just came.

Tommy poured a cup and held it for him to drink.

"You may find a handkerchief somewhere about," said Hay. "If not, there are some in that bag over by the window. Castle washes them for me," he added irrelevantly.

Tommy found him two, and said as he gave them: "I say, I'm most awfully sorry, that must have hurt like blazes."

"It did," said Hay shortly. "It does still."

"I'm most awfully sorry—what an utter beast! But I didn't think it would do for me to interfere."

Hay did not answer, he simply looked at Tommy and something in his look was hostile and aloof.

"He thinks I ought to have," thought Tommy. "Good Lord, one can't wonder."

"I'm most awfully sorry," he said aloud. "You see—I thought—"

"Oh, yes," said Hay in a cold, unfriendly voice, "I quite understand."

Tommy poured him another cup of tea. "It must have hurt simply frightfully," he said sympathetically.

'Oh, yes—" said Hay, "but that's not the joke. It sort of jarred everything—I don't know when it will stop hurting—but that's not the joke either. The joke is that I nearly—very nearly—believed you."

"But I say," Tommy protested, "I think you are a bit hard on a fellow, you know—you see—"

"Oh, yes, I see," cried Hay bitterly. "I see all right. Better than you want me to. And Putnam too. He saw. He saw you when the plank fell and did not want me to know he had seen you.

"You—I nearly trusted you. Thank God not quite."

"Good Lord," cried Tommy, "you mean you really think I'm in with that brute?"

"It doesn't matter," said Hay in a quiet, desolate voice. "God knows how you got there—how we, any of us, got anywhere. I'm not really sorry. You'll be better able to look after Cecily. Promise me that again."

"I promise," said Tommy gravely. "But—"

"Good. Now one thing more. Please go away. I can't talk."

"But I say—can't I do anything to make you more comfortable?"

"Only that. Nothing else—oh, yes—at least there is one thing: Don't tell Putnam I've been crying. I hate to give him pleasure. Now go away. Let me think about it all. Good night."

Tommy lingered a moment then turned sadly and walked towards the window. He was just opening it when Hay called after him, "Have you seen Cecily?"

"Yes," said Tommy, "it was she who first—"

"Never mind what she did. You have seen her—and Putnam—well—"

"I've promised you about six times," Tommy exclaimed, giving way suddenly to a lively sense of grievance, "but what's the good when you don't believe a single solitary word I say?"

Hay looked at him strangely. "It's not your word I trust—it's your face. Good night."

Tommy climbed dejectedly out of the window, walked down across the sand and stood staring at the pale streaks of foam on the dark, heaving sea.

Then he remembered that he had left Dawson's bag with his beard in it in Hay's room.

"Oh, hang it all," he thought, "I am better without it. I'll say—I'll say—" he paced up and down the little cove considering what he would have to say.

## CHAPTER XI

### CRASH!

He had been waiting there some time when he heard the splash of oars, and saw Castle's boat creeping round the corner towards him. That was a relief, for he was beginning to realise that he was tired, cold and hungry, and also after what he had seen it was going to be beastly difficult to be at all polite to Putnam.

Putnam must have heard too, for he came down out of the house and helped pull the boat ashore.

"Come in both of you," said Castle as he landed, "I've got something important to tell you." Tommy's heart leapt, for Castle's manner clearly indicated bad news. Had Dawson escaped and communicated? Was it Mogridge? Was it police? Attempted rescue? If so Hay's life was in danger—and his own.

"Go upstairs," Castle went on, "I'll just look in at Hay as I pass."

Putnam and Tommy waited in the room directly over that in which Hay was lying. There was food on the table with three places laid.

Putnam's manner was nervous and apologetic which made Tommy think that to express displeasure could not be a mistake.

"What on earth made you butt in like that?" he be-

gan, "Hay saw you see me and pretend not to. Goodness knows how I'll ever get him to believe in me now."

"Sorry," Putnam murmured.

Thus encouraged Tommy went on indignantly: "That was why he told you to stand the lamp in the corner where I was, so that the light would shine on my legs and make us both feel fools. He knew you'd seen me. He was just beginning to tell me all his troubles, but now you have just jolly well gone and dished the whole confounded applecart. Damn you—if you see what I mean."

"Didn't know you were there," said Putnam grudgingly.

"But Castle did," Tommy insisted, "and I'm sure he told you. Now did he or didn't he?"

"He did," Putnam admitted, "said you might be. But I looked through the keyhole and couldn't see you so thought you'd gone upstairs or out again. How was I to know you were hiding in a corner?"

"What d'you suppose I'd do when I heard you pounding along the passage like a short-winded earthquake?"

The door opened, and Castle's worried face appeared.

"What is it?" Putnam asked.

Castle hesitated, glanced uncertainly at him and at Tommy.

"This," he said, and handed a telegram to Putnam.

Putnam read it with a puzzled expression, looked at Tommy, then at Castle.

"But—" he began.

Castle checked him by holding up his hand, took the

telegram from him and presented it to Tommy. It appeared to be a mere jumble of meaningless words.

"Crash!" was Tommy's mental comment, but, on the principle that if you do not give yourself away too soon something unexpected may turn up at the last minute to save you, he read it over carefully—very carefully—and muttered, "That's awkward," (It seemed a safe comment, Castle's expression had said as much all along.) Then he handed the telegram back to Castle, who was watching him expectantly, and said, "Well, what do you think we ought to do about that?"

Castle did not speak, but looked significantly across at Putnam.

"I'm dished," thought Tommy, but aloud he said, "I'd like to hear your opinion and Putnam's too."

"I don't understand," Putnam began heavily.

"Don't you?" Castle interrupted, "don't you see? It's quite simple. This is not Dawson. It's someone else."

"Crash bang!" thought Tommy, and said nothing at all.

In the silence that followed they could hear through the thin, ill-fitting boards of the floor, the clatter of crockery, as Hay pushed the tray with the tea things away from beside him.

Putnam's face lit with cruel pleasure. Castle understood that look.

"I am in command here," he said uneasily.

"We have our orders," Putnam answered.

Castle moved towards the door, as though he feared that Putnam might try to pass him. "It's all in my charge," he said, "if Sefton had wanted us to act he

could have said so here." He indicated the telegram. "I'll do nothing without more explicit orders."

Tommy's heart sank and grew cold. It is horrible to be present at the crisis, and not to understand. He felt the clash of two wills, and knew that everything was in the balance, but he could not realise the emotional meaning of the moment—that Putnam's hatred and Castle's pity were at last at open war.

"Orders?" Putnam exclaimed savagely. "He gave us orders before he left. Why should he repeat his orders?" And slowly he began to approach Castle who was standing in the doorway.

Tommy felt danger—felt it acutely, then suddenly remembered Dawson's pistol. Where was it? Good Lord, it was wrapped in Dawson's pyjamas, packed in Dawson's bag, which he had left in Hay's room. What a poisonous fool!

"There's no earthly reason why he should repeat his orders," Putnam went on, to which Castle replied:

"He left me in charge, not you, and you'll obey me till he comes back."

"I take my orders from Sefton," was the sullen answer, "not from you."

It was obvious that if it came to a fight, Castle would not stand a chance, but Tommy was not sure that it would. The older, frailer man seemed still to have a certain rather shaky authority over the other.

"You know exactly what he said," Putnam went on. " 'Take no risks—' You know the rest."

"Yes, I know," Castle answered hotly, "and I know what he meant and what we are all working for, and

I'm not going to mess the whole thing just to amuse you."

"If Sefton were here—" Putnam began.

Castle interrupted here, taking up his words, "If Sefton were here, Sefton would decide. As he isn't, I do. I am not convinced there is any danger. If I were, I'd act myself. You'll not touch him while I'm here. I promised him that I'd do it myself. You'll not touch him, so don't think it."

Then Tommy realised that no one was watching him, and that though he could not reach the door he was near an open window, that Hay and Dawson's pistol were both in the room below and that the boat was drawn up on the beach a few yards away. Oh, what a fool not to have thought of that before!

Putnam had his back to him and Castle's eyes and attention were fixed upon Putnam, whose manner was still threatening.

It was easy. He sat on the ledge, swung himself out, and dropped on to the dry sand below.

Hay looked up seeing the window suddenly darkened by a large falling object, and the next moment Tommy's face appeared.

It was evident by the lamplight that Hay had been crying a good deal. His eyelids were red and his face mottled. Tommy had hoped to find in him a substitute for Mogridge, something he could lean and rely on. Failing that, this suited him as well as anything—something pitiful in utter collapse, whose dependent helplessness forced him to think and act for two.

"I say, Hay," he began, "Putnam and Castle are

fighting about whether to kill you or not. I don't know who'll win, but it's high tide, the boat's just here. Why can't I drag you down over the sand somehow and get away?"

Hay looked about him wildly.

"The sand—yes," he said in a tone of controlled excitement, "but not this window. You'd never get me up. Too high. I can't help at all. Not only my leg. One arm as well. The door's locked—but see if the key is still on the outside."

Tommy disappeared. Hay waited with a beating heart, heard him open the front door, then try the door of his room, and then saw him again at the window.

"No good," he said, "he's taken it."

If that was a blow, Hay took it in silence.

Tommy dropped on to the floor of the room and began looking about for his bag.

"Were they actually fighting?" Hay asked quietly. He was calmer than Tommy had expected.

"No," was the answer, "only arguing."

"A fight would be over by now," Hay remarked, "an argument may last all night. But I say what are you looking for?"

"My bag, have you seen it?"

"Oh, yes, Castle took it up. He thought you might want it."

"Great snakes!" cried Tommy ruefully, "Dawson's pistol was in it. That puts the lid on."

Hay looked at him sharply and then, "Not quite," he said, "not if you really want to rescue me. Look here.

Quick. Take the boat and go for help. Police or something. Quick—before they come."

Tommy thought hard for a moment.

"No," he said, "I can't. It would all be over before the police came. They've found me out. Putnam thinks I'm a rescue party and wants to kill you on the spot. Castle is standing out against that, but he'd cave in if I went. They'd know I'd gone for help. My going would settle the matter."

Hay bit his lip. His face was white and drawn.

"Better go," he muttered. Tommy shook his head.

There was a movement above, a heavy tread.

"Putnam," said Hay softly, "quick, if you want to go."

"No, I'll stay with you." He laid his hand on Hay's wrist and felt it as cold as ice. That touched him strangely. Wretched to lie there helpless, just waiting to be killed.

"I'll put up a fight for you, Hay," he promised.

"No use," came the whispered answer. "Sure to be armed—and stronger than an elephant."

The heavy steps were creaking down the steep, awkward stairs.

"You've still time," Hay went on in a low, strained voice, "get that brute caught and punished and me decently buried somewhere else."

"No—I'll not leave you."

There was a moment of terrible suspense as the steps approached the door, but they passed it and went on out of the cottage.

Tommy ran to the window.

"He's hauling up the boat," he said.

"They fasten it with a chain and padlock," Hay told him. "You have lost your chance now."

Tommy shook his head, "I had no use for it."

He came back and sat on the floor beside Hay, who laughed, a little out of breath, and said: "Oh, well—most likely they'd have shot you before you could get round the corner."

"Then," Tommy said, "you do believe in me, now? You don't think I am one of them?"

Hay paused before answering and then spoke slowly. "You are not Putnam. You don't want me killed. I can see—" he broke off sharply, then whispered. "Listen—he's coming in again."

"And Castle," Tommy added, "is coming downstairs."

"You must think me a beast," Hay went on quickly, "if you really came to rescue me. Anyhow—either way—you've been awfully decent and I'm jolly grateful. But one way—that way—I've got you into a pretty bad hole. I rather hope that I haven't."

"Oh, shut up," exclaimed Tommy angrily. "How can you have the face to say you hope I'm a rotten beast like Putnam? You're enough to make a saint swear. It doesn't matter about me. I mean to say, I'm not the sort of fellow that counts much anyway. But thank God I've no thought of hurting you or getting things out of you—or of anything but helping you."

"Sorry," said Hay, and Tommy did not know whether he was apologising for thinking ill of him or for bringing him into danger.

"Sorry for what?" he asked savagely.

Hay laughed, and on his laughter the door opened and Castle came in with a revolver in his hand. Putnam stood just behind him in the doorway.

"Castle!" cried Hay, with a catch in his voice. "Are you going to kill me? Have you come to keep your promise?"

Tommy rose to his feet and stood hesitating. If he jumped at Castle there was Putnam close behind him, it would be useless. But yet if Castle were going to shoot it was impossible just to watch him do it.

"Castle," Hay called on a rising note, "speak to me first. Tell me."

Castle did not answer. He looked at Tommy and spoke to Putnam.

"See if he has any weapon," he said, "I'll keep him covered while you search."

"Castle's a damn good shot," Hay said warningly.

Tommy thought of the active heroes of the cinema. He would have tried to rush them and bolt, or make a dive for the window, but Hay's helpless presence paralysed him. He really didn't know what Douglas Fairbanks would have done in a situation of this kind.

Putnam felt him all over, took his purse and his pocketknife, and grunted. "Nothing."

Castle then said. "You will have to go into the back room, till we decide what to do. This window is too easy. I may tell you Putnam wants to kill you at once."

"He would," thought Tommy.

"And we shan't hesitate if you try to escape."

Escape—Tommy looked at Hay, who was watching him out of half shut eyes. Escape—how could he?

"The back room, Putnam," Castle went on, "take him there at once."

"What about him," Tommy asked, looking at Hay.

"He means," said Hay softly, "that if you are going to kill me, he'd rather you got on with it now, with him looking on. Then he will know exactly where he is."

Castle hesitated.

"There's no harm, I think, in their being together," he said nervously.

Hay watching them intently saw, or thought he saw, some slight signal pass between Castle and Putnam—a look—a gesture—something scarcely perceptible.

"Dunno that there is," Putnam grunted, "except that Hay's the very devil to hold; he'll give the other ideas."

"Don't see how anyone can get out of that room unless you give them the key," Castle retorted sharply.

This was evidently a gibe of some sort, for Putnam answered sullenly, "It was you had him moved upstairs."

Castle turned to Tommy.

"Well, Dawson," he said, "or whatever your name is, I think you and I could carry Hay in on his mattress without much difficulty."

Putnam was obviously stronger than either of them, but Castle was afraid that he would jolt Hay purposely, or drop him roughly.

They carried him into the small, back, downstairs room and arranged things as best they could for his comfort. Putnam stayed outside in the passage.

"You'll be able to look after him a bit," Castle said, "I'm often worried about him in the night."

This friendliness struck Tommy as strange, unnatural and uncanny, especially as it was obviously sincere.

"I say," he asked, "what's going to happen? What are you going to do?"

"I don't know—I don't know—" Castle looked worried and unhappy, "I hope—I mean—I *really* don't know." He bent over Hay and said gently, "You have had a bad day, and it's hurting now, I can see that."

Hay smiled. Really he had charming manners, Tommy thought, and there was something very winning about him. "It's been a busy day for all of us," he said, and somehow his voice and his look conveyed his appreciation of the fact that Castle was protecting him from Putnam. He seemed very tired now that the excitement was over.

"Do you believe in me, now?" Tommy asked as soon as they were alone.

"I don't know," was the answer, "I'm too tired to think. You are behaving exactly as I would if I were Dawson trying to convince me that he had really come to help. One way I owe you a lot—your life is in danger on my account."

"Please don't," Tommy interrupted, blushing, "it really doesn't matter."

"The other way," Hay went on, "I still owe you something. I like having you here. It is a change and a relief to meet someone like you to talk to. And I know that if they had tried to kill me you would have interfered."

"Rot," said Tommy, "if I'd been Dawson that would have been a put up job, and I'd have known it."

"Yes." Hay looked at him very thoughtfully. "That is so. You would have known that. You would have known that, and I don't think you did. And I am sure," he went on after a moment's pause, "that you will try to look after Cecily? No use saying more if I don't mean it, is it?"

"No," Tommy agreed mournfully, "no earthly at all. And anyhow it's no use trusting me now they've found me out. I can't help you. We are just in a hole together. But I say—you did seem ready when I suggested it to do a bunk with me."

"Oh, Lord—yes. Even if you'd been Dawson and I'd known it. Or Sefton. Or the devil. I was all for a change. You can't know till you've tried it what boredom can be. Besides," his voice sank, and wavered a little, "besides—there was a chance you weren't—and escape—escape. . . .

"Oh, God," he cried suddenly, "there seemed, didn't there—just a chance for just a minute?"

"The beasts! The swine!" Tommy murmured fervently, for that exclamation was like a flash of light showing what had gone before and what still lay ahead. "The beasts—oh, Hay—and I am here and can't help you at all."

Hay looked at him doubtfully, searchingly. "Tell me how you came here," he suggested.

Tommy sulked. "What's the good? You'll not believe it? You'll not believe a blasted word I say. You think

I'm Dawson, come to get secrets out of it, and in league with all these filthy poisonous beasts."

"Castle's not poisonous or a beast," Hay interrupted.

Tommy was feeling very bitter. "If he's not poisonous—he's dirt," he said.

Hay laughed, "Matter in the wrong place," he suggested flippantly, "isn't that someone's definition of dirt?"

Tommy gasped. "I say, Hay—I just came because your sister seemed to want help—I mean to say—I made out there was some sort of a fellow, you know in some sort of a beastly awkward hole. That was all. If I'd known it was you—I mean—you know, you are rather fine. So is your sister. But not as—still she does laugh rather like you."

"Oh, dry up," said Hay, but he was pleased, for he appreciated admiration. "Dry up and tell me the story of your life."

Tommy told him the whole thing from his first meeting with Cecily in the train.

"Clever—" Hay murmured, "dashed clever, unless it happens to be true. Sefton could have coached you. I don't know—

"Well—now perhaps you would like to hear my story. I'll make it as brief as I can, for I'm not a bit interesting.

"They tell me my uncle before he died hid something very valuable somewhere. I happened to be the only friend or relation who saw him during his last illness. He telegraphed for me to go to him—I was abroad. Con-

sequently Sefton concludes he told me what and where. That's about all there is to it."

"But surely," Tommy protested, "surely to goodness if that's all, you won't let them kill you, and your sister perhaps too, simply for that—whatever it is, I mean, your life and hers are worth more to you."

Hay smiled mocking and aloof. "Exactly," he said, "but you see my uncle never told me. I don't even know whether it's an oil well, or an incriminating document or a diamond tiara they keep asking me about. My uncle was really very ill when he died. People sometimes are, you know—not infrequently. He hardly talked at all."

Tommy knew that he was lying without even expecting to be believed.

Later Castle brought them in some supper and water to wash in, and blankets and pillows for Tommy and some of the things out of Dawson's bag.

"You'll both be tired," he said, then looked at Hay and shook his head, sadly. "Poor boy," he murmured, "you ought to have told. You ought to have told long ago."

"You admit then, that it's too late now," Hay challenged him, smiling. Really his changes of mood were bewildering to Tommy.

Castle looked worried. "God help us all," he whispered helplessly.

Tommy was touched, but Hay laughed: "You old humbug," he said, "when did you begin to believe in God?"

"I don't know," came the mournful answer, "I don't

know—" He was thinking not of Hay's question but of his own doubts and fears and anxieties. "I don't know at all—but I'm afraid Sefton will say that Putnam was right this time—I'm afraid he may. Only—"

"Good night," Hay interrupted him, "for God's sake don't let's start grousing about our shady futures."

Again Castle shook his head and sighed, then he went out taking the lamp with him, and left them together in the dark.

"Good night," said Hay, "let's try to get to sleep. I feel as if something might be going to happen tomorrow."

"Do you really?" said Tommy, "I feel as if quite a lot had happened to-day."

Hay laughed, and then was quiet; and that long, strange laugh haunted Tommy for what seemed like hours and hours before he could sleep.

## CHAPTER XII

### NIGHTPIECE

[Again a chapter without incident, that retards the action and may be skipped without harm to the narrative, except that it throws some light not elsewhere obtainable upon the past.]

Not that Tommy wanted to sleep at first. He was only too glad of a little quiet to think things over and arrange his thoughts in some sort of order.

Actually he had learnt little that was new. Hay was kept here a prisoner by people who wanted to find out something he knew and who had every intention of killing him if there seemed a chance of his escaping.

All that he knew already. The fresh element was Hay's personality and his motive for silence, and that baffled him. He had spoken very strongly—"You don't believe I don't know—believe this—you can—you must —I *can't* tell." Not "I won't" but "I can't."

For all Hay's complexity of mood, Tommy guessed that his outlook on life was simple. His mind might be subtle, but his creed was not. "Get that brute caught and punished and me buried decently somewhere else."

Vengeance and a proper funeral—that was the demand of the hero of an epic—of Roland and people like that. Yes, Hay would have the simple code of the fighter. Loyalty—honour—the explanation must lie somewhere

there. His word was pledged, or else a friend was involved.

But would he really sacrifice Cecily as well as himself, as Roland sacrificed all the Franks to his pride?

The laugh haunted him because he felt it was characteristic of Hay, and Hay's personality was beginning to fascinate him extraordinarily. He went over the day's events, and his heart was sore with pity for this brave, defiant, angry thing, nearly beaten—that was the terrible part, Tommy felt, so very nearly beaten—but fighting still and still laughing.

He remembered Cecily, the lady of the latchkey. She was like her brother in some ways, she had his eyes, and something of his quickness of mood and unexpected readiness of speech; but it was like that poem he had been bored with at school—about moonlight unto sunlight and water unto wine.

Hay too lay awake, his restless mind running in circles. He had been quite sincere in suggesting sleep, but soon found that it was out of the question. What troubled him most was his inability to make up his mind about Tommy. Tommy did not look a bad sort; but then Hay considered, plenty of quite decent fellows find themselves committed to a line of conduct that is not decent at all, and all external circumstances seemed to indicate that this was an enemy, not a friend.

He remembered how Castle had told Sefton that if they tried to force the truth from him they would probably kill him—obviously if Sefton believed that he would try to trick him into telling. He had tried once, had failed and had gone away—clearly, clearly to ar-

range a second more elaborate trap. A few days later this stranger had arrived. Putnam had seen him hiding, and had tried to give an impression of not having seen. That had confirmed Hay's suspicions. Presently Tommy had produced this story—which they had all had a chance of concocting together—of his deceiving Putnam and Castle and now being found out. And then too Hay was positive that something had passed between Putnam and Castle—a look—a sign—a signal of understanding—when Tommy had expressed a wish to stay with him.

Against this he could only set his impression of Tommy's face and manner, which appealed to him as honest and sincere. "But after all," he thought, "it's a poor sort of scoundrel that can't look honest, they probably chose him for the job on account of his face."

Tommy fell asleep at last, but only to dream horrible and disturbing things. It was always Putnam and Cecily or Putnam and Hay and some cruelty he was powerless to prevent because he had forgotten some word or lost some object, and then through it he heard a voice saying: "Dawson, are you awake?"

"I'm not Dawson," he answered angrily, as he woke, "my name is Wood—" and then, remembering where he was and realising who had spoken; "What is it?" he asked, "do you want anything?"

"Oh, no," said Hay, "only I can't sleep and you were grunting so I thought perhaps you'd rather not."

The room felt close to Tommy, hot and breathless. "I'm awfully sorry," he apologised, "did I keep you awake? I was having a beastly dream."

"So I thought," said Hay, "or I'd not have waked you. Do you want to go to sleep again?"

"No, thanks," said Tommy, "I've had enough for the moment. I say though—can't we open the window?"

"It's open all it can," Hay answered.

"Good Lord," Tommy growled, "what a hole!"

"It's the cliff," Hay explained, "we are close against it and it keeps out all the air. But it's warm to-night; it's worse—far worse when it's cold."

Tommy could imagine that. "Like the bottom of a well," he suggested.

"Yes," said Hay, "or a deep, narrow cave. Listen though—it's raining outside."

"And I can hear the sea," Tommy added. Then after a moment's pause, "God, what a hole, though!"

"There's no wind," said Hay, "no wind at all."

"Not a breath," Tommy agreed. "It's like being stifled with a warm, wet blanket."

They were silent for a little, Tommy listening to the steady, settling rustle of the rain, and to the drag of the waves on the shingles.

Presently he said quite suddenly: "It's queer in here in the dark—isn't it?"

"Yes," Hay assented, "like a rock in the sea. A little rock with water all round."

Tommy's fancy caught at the image. "And not knowing whether the tide is going up or down."

"I've often thought that," Hay went on in a low voice. "And waves you know—great strong shattering waves—one just holds on somehow.

"But now, to-night, it's calm, one simply waits."

"Hay," said Tommy with a sudden flash of realisation, "you've had a perfectly ghastly time."

"Ghastly," Hay agreed quietly.

"I don't suppose you want to talk about it?"

"I'd rather you talked—do you mind?"

"Oh, Lord," protested Tommy helplessly, "what shall I talk about?"

There was a moment's silence, filled by the low, monotonous voices of the sea and rain, then Hay began in a strange, hushed, guarded voice: "I may as well tell you about it.

"They thought, of course, they'd got an easy job. Easy to make me tell. Easy—well—it *was* either easy or impossible. They kept me in the dark and cold—a room with bare boards and only the clothes I was wearing—and threatened and starved me—and all that. But I wasn't frightened—not then—not at first. I was angry. They had no right to be interfering with me—that was what I felt."

His long laugh sounded queerer than ever in the dark. Tommy waited and he went on speaking quickly and without emphasis.

"I was angry and I let them see it. Then Sefton said it was taking too long. He liked me—Sefton liked me because I wasn't afraid of him. But he's not sentimental. His liking never interfered with business. I hit him once as hard as I could. He'd make me angry. Of course then he simply wiped the floor with me. He's a powerful man, but there was some satisfaction in having hit him first."

It was very dark. Hay's face was visible only as a

palish blur, his eyes as vague, dark shadows. In every pause in his hurried, ill-connected sentences, Tommy could hear the soft, insistent, penetrating whisper of the rain. The room seemed unbearably close—stifling.

"I got no sleep," Hay went on, "not much I mean—not enough—they kept waking me."

Some instinct told Tommy there was worse to come. "Don't go on if you'd rather not," he said, nervously.

As regards mere preference, Hay was too tired to wish to talk at all, and he hated with all his soul recalling these things, but it was part of his plan of action to impress Dawson or Wood or whoever this was with the undesirability of his associates.

He spoke in a low voice, rapid and casual. "Oh, well—they tied me up—slung me like a sort of a hammock—across the room. This room it was. Tying my wrists and ankles. I was too angry at first to care what they did. But Sefton—that's him all over—went away and left me there. Till I was sick of it. Then came and bothered me with questions. I got sicker and wilder. Cursed them all for all I was worth.

"Then he laid pieces of driftwood on top of me—make me heavier you see, and increase the strain. They left me then again. It was bad, I got frantic and tried to get free. That made it worse, of course. I don't suppose my wrists will ever lose the marks.

"He came back then and asked me more. I was fairly demented with rage. Cursed all I knew and cried too."

"Good Lord," Tommy murmured, "the brutes!" The dark, close room seemed a part of Hay's narrative. Tommy felt stifled and sick. Such things could only be

done or told in an airless, stuffy place like this. He could not have said whether the sense of horrible oppression that clutched him was due to the atmosphere or to what he was hearing. He wanted to shout, "Stop, stop, I can't breathe!" but all he said was, "Good Lord—what happened?"

It was unbearable in Hay's quick, breathless, expressionless speech. "Then Sefton got a heap of seaweed and mess of sorts—I don't know exactly what—"

(Tommy wanted to scream, "It doesn't in the very least matter what!")

"—all sorts of dampish, messy stuff and lit it and shut the window. Made a beast of a smoke and stink. Lit it, you know, and let it smoulder. Nearly choked me. I don't know if you can imagine—tied like that—I couldn't have.

"Left me too long. He didn't realise. Good Lord—I could hardly speak—I was done when he took me down. Past crying or cursing anything. They asked me—Lord—I could scarcely say 'damn!' For days I fainted if anyone looked at me. Castle got them all scared about me. Said I'd drop dead any minute if I wasn't kindly treated. He'd had enough, you see, same as I had. Frightened them all about my heart. I daresay it was a bit—rattled—as you might say. But I don't believe most people's would have stood it much better. I accused Castle one day of having exaggerated, he didn't deny it."

"Oh, Lord," Tommy groaned suddenly, "there's no air."

"It's the cliff," Hay repeated in his low, flat voice,

"and the window's too small and too high. But you may find a draught between the crack of the door and the fireplace. Anyhow it must be stuffy everywhere tonight."

"I—I didn't exactly mean to say that," said Tommy, confused and apologetic. "It did seem now a most extraordinary thing to have said." Then he asked uneasily, "Well—then—what happened next?"

"Oh, after that," Hay went on speaking more readily and in a more natural voice, "after that the tide went down. I got stronger. They treated me better. Let me out on the beach a bit and gave me plenty of blankets and food. Of course I knew what they wanted—but I suppose I'm made that way—I couldn't help getting stronger and fitter. Twice I tried to escape. The second time up the cliff. Smashed myself as you see.

"Since then, I think—in a way—the worst time of all. You don't know—you can't imagine—what boredom can be like."

"Boredom!" Tommy echoed in surprise. It seemed to him a minor ill after what Hay had described.

"Yes," Hay insisted, "positive, immense. You see with a broken arm and leg you can't *think* much even. I mean it limits your scope. You can't begin to plan an escape when you know it's got to involve a long swim or a difficult climb. And what on earth else can one want to think about? One's so helpless too—and time is so interminable with the dashed thing hurting all the while."

There was a long pause. Tommy heard the rain and the sea and for the life of him could think of nothing

to say till Hay asked suddenly: "I say—what is the date?"

Tommy considered and counted on his fingers a little confused by the night he had spent in the rain.

"September the eighteenth," he said.

"Eighteenth," Hay repeated thoughtfully. Then suddenly he laughed. "Eighteenth—my birthday to-morrow. I wonder how it will be celebrated."

Tommy shivered. It was extraordinary how strongly he felt about Hay, intense admiration and a passionate longing to protect, but also bitter resentment of his refusal to trust him. All this was emphasised by the story he had just heard.

"The beasts—" he said, "and you think I'm one of them."

"Oh, no," Hay replied quickly, "you'd have been sick—like Castle—or sicker."

"And you mean," Tommy pursued, "that you are expecting that sort of thing all over again?"

"Not to-morrow," Hay answered, "not immediately—but some time—probably before the finish."

"Oh, Lord," Tommy groaned. "You—they—"

"Never mind," Hay checked him, "it's—well—don't let's talk of it."

Tommy looked up at the window and cried eagerly, "I say—the cliff looks lighter. I believe it's morning!"

Hay sighed and then laughed again. "Another day. Good luck to it."

Once more they were silent a few minutes and then Tommy asked, "What do you think is going to happen?"

"I don't know," Hay answered slowly. "It depends on so many things. First on you."

"Me!" exclaimed Tommy bewildered.

"What you are, I mean—and why you came."

"It's odd," Tommy remarked thoughtfully, "that you and I can talk quite friendly, like this, while you think that of me. You'd think you'd be too sick to talk, and I too wild with you to listen."

Hay shook his head. "One's feelings aren't always as stereotyped as one thinks. One likes or dislikes—loves or hates—because one does—not because of benefits or injuries."

"I'd hate anyone that treated me like that," Tommy insisted.

Hay answered doubtfully and slowly. "Do I hate Sefton? I don't know—perhaps. Putnam—yes, but not Castle. And love isn't to be bought with presents or kindness. One doesn't always hate an enemy. Though often I fancy people make themselves believe they do because they think it the proper thing to do. People who could never love or hate—who haven't enough heart to know what it means."

Tommy did not quite follow all that. "You're an imaginative sort of chap," he commented.

"Imaginative!" Hay exclaimed, "No, no, thank heaven I am not imaginative. I think in words—not in images of any kind. I say 'the grass is green,' and 'green'—thank God—is a counter—a label—not a sensation.

"No, if I'd been cursed with any shred of imagination I'd have gone mad weeks—centuries—ago."

Tommy followed that still less. "Well," he said, "just assuming that I am what I say I am, what do you think is going to happen to-day?"

It was on the other assumption that Hay had been working all night, but he turned readily to this problem.

"Well—assuming that," he said after a moment's thought, "someone will communicate with Sefton in the morning."

"How?"

"Telegraph. Castle will land early. As soon as the office is opened."

"Why Castle?"

"In case you escape. Not likely—but—conceivable. Putnam's the stronger and you are fit and ablebodied. You'd be more than a match for poor old Castle."

"I see—yes—and then?"

"Sefton will answer, or else come. If he answers he will back Putnam—who is, technically, in the right."

"Back Putnam," Tommy whispered appalled, "you mean—kill us?"

"Me—yes," Hay answered deliberately. "I don't know about you. They needn't really, as you know very little. They may just drop you somewhere while they clear. Leave you here perhaps, locked into the cottage. But they may think I've told you things I don't mean to. Things I know about them. In that case they daren't risk it."

"You mean," Tommy asked incredulously, "you really mean you think to-morrow they will come in here and kill us?"

Hay's voice was steady, but a little harsh. "Yes, I mean that. Me certainly and probably you. That is if you are what you say, and Sefton answers by telegram."

"But," Tommy objected, "they won't dare. I mean it would be found out. I mean—I mean you *can't* just kill people you don't like—"

"I fancy," Hay broke in on his faltering bewilderment, "they have fixed on a place to hide me—somewhere very difficult to find."

Somehow that seemed to be the last straw—to be poked away out of sight on that horrible island and never heard of again.

"They can't," Tommy protested weakly. "They can't—I mean, I simply can't get hold of it, that it's me—*me* in a hole like this. You see, it doesn't seem likely that anything so extraordinary should happen to an ordinary sort of person like me. Like railway accidents and earthquakes. You read of them. You know they happen, but never expect actually to be in one. But of course you wouldn't feel like that. Things have happened to you—queer things."

"Death's queer," Hay commented softly, "queer to think about. But it's very usual."

Tommy shivered. "I can't get hold of it," he said. "But I say—if Sefton comes—what then?"

Hay did not answer for so long that Tommy repeated his question. "What will happen if Sefton comes instead of telegraphing?"

"If Sefton comes," said Hay, in that strange, slow, level voice from which all emotion seemed to be carefully screened, "it will mean that he intends to have one

last try at finding out what he wishes to know. He will spring one thing on me—then another—a hundred—till I've told him or till I'm dead. That's for me. You—he's more intelligent than the others, consequently likelier to believe the truth. It may be possible to convince him you are not dangerous. The same applies to Cecily. He'll listen to what we say, and may believe. There's nothing so impossible to convince as a fool." His voice had sunk to a hushed whisper.

Tommy realised that he was badly frightened and extraordinarily determined. He wondered what it was all about.

"Good Lord!" he cried suddenly, "is it worth it? Why can't you tell and have done with it?"

Certainly it was lighter. Tommy could see something of the contour of Hay's face, turned towards him. The dark, wide, open eyes and the set line of the mouth. He was sorry he had spoken, for there was suffering in the face.

"I *can't* tell," came the deliberate answer. "If I could I would have told already. But I can't. And you can never make me do an impossible thing."

It was too much.

"Great heavens!" Tommy cried in anger. "Do you still think I am one of them? What in hell do you take me for?"

Hay smiled, a dim smile in the darkness. "Castle's a good fellow," he said, "I won't hear a word against him. A good fellow—in the wrong place. And you—perhaps—another."

His voice was so tired that Tommy suddenly felt bit-

terly penitent for having made him talk so much, and yet he had to register his protest.

"You're a bit hard," he said, "I came to help you. Once you nearly trusted me. If you had—if you would —I might be able to help you."

"No, no," Hay answered. "Not now. Not however much I trusted you. Don't you understand? No one knows but me. Let them find out from me, if they can."

"If they can," he repeated after a pause, then laughed to himself. "If they can make me do what I can't, why let them."

He shut his eyes then and lay still. Tommy watched him without speaking and before long saw that he was asleep.

The light grew slowly in the room. Tommy heard sounds and movements above and wondered what the day would bring. Hay slept while his birthday dawned in grey, clammy, mistlike rain.

Suddenly, after the close heat of the night, Tommy began to shiver. He was still oppressed, but now chilly. He could not free his mind from the memory of Hay's broken, hurried narrative. He saw him asleep in the cold, pale light and involuntarily pictured the whole thing.

"I got frantic and tried to get free—" It was unbearable; for Tommy was blessed or cursed with the kind of imagination that Hay had so eagerly disclaimed.

One hand lay outside the bedclothes, pale against the dark rug that covered them. It was light enough now for Tommy to see the scars not long healed on the bare wrist. He shuddered and believed he would be quite

ready to die and be hidden in a hole if only Hay would believe him first and trust him. He wanted his confidence and friendship, wanted them even more than to help and protect him, and that he wanted above anything else on earth.

It was daylight as much as it ever could be in a room with one small window, looking on to a wall of cliff. The rain had dwindled to a fine drizzle, which drifted in, damp and cold. Tommy didn't know whether that made him feel so chill and shivery, or whether it was the memory of those few quick phrases which still ran on in his mind. Hearing someone at the door he rose quickly and went forward. It was Castle, but Putnam was close behind him.

"He's asleep," said Tommy, eager to protect, "don't wake him. He didn't sleep at all till it began to grow light."

"All right," Castle answered in a husky whisper, "but look here. I'm going ashore and I don't know when I'll be back. You can make breakfast for him and all that. Lunch too if I am late. Putnam has the key, of course, but I don't see why you shouldn't look after him till I come in again. I'll leave you all you need."

So Hay was right, Castle was going ashore. Going ashore to telegraph to Sefton and wait for an answer at Aunas or Glenerris.

When the door was locked, Tommy sat down trembling with excitement and anxious not to wake the sleeper. His heart was full of savage hatred of Sefton and Putnam—of Castle too, for Castle had stood by and not interfered. Then suddenly his anger was hot against

Hay himself. What in the world—what possible or impossible secret—could be worth the marring and ultimate destruction of this strange, sudden, vivid thing? Couldn't the fool see that he himself was worth many times more than anything anyone could want to get out of him?

Hatred—black hatred of the cruelty and waste—fury at Hay's own stupid obstinacy—so filled his heart that when at last Hay roused and woke he exclaimed quite involuntarily. "It's not worth it whatever it is. Tell and have done with it."

And Hay answered angrily, "Haven't I told you that I can't?"

"We shall stifle in here," Tommy cried, "there's no air—no air at all."

"One gets used to that," Hay told him lightly, "I suppose it lowers one's vitality, but one doesn't mind after a bit. I know it feels beastly at first."

"Beastly at first—" thought Tommy, "Good Lord, what he's been through!

"I'm awfully sorry," he said, "I wish to goodness you'd believe me."

Hay did not answer, and so Tommy sadly and penitently lighted the spirit-stove Castle had given him and put on the kettle.

## CHAPTER XIII

### CONVERSATION

THROUGH half shut eyes Hay watched while Tommy busied himself heating water for washing, and preparing breakfast.

Clearly this morning's job was to come to some decision about him. Any moment an emergency might arise in which it would be essential to know whether one was dealing with a friend or an enemy.

Sefton would come. He knew Sefton would come, unless indeed the police were so close on his tracks that he would simply wire, "Conceal traces and clear," or some such message.

If he telegraphed that, there was not much to be done; only one thing, and that only if Wood were really a friend.

"I've been thinking," he said, "if Sefton tells them to bury me and run, Castle will come in here. I'll talk and try to hold his attention. You must jump on him and get his weapon and do the best you can for both of us. It's a mighty poor chance as Putnam will almost certainly be there too—Castle won't risk visiting us alone —but it might be worth trying if they mean to kill us any way."

Tommy beamed. This looked like confidence. Then he realised it was actually his own murder and Hay's they were talking about and that sobered him.

"All right," he said, "I'll try."

"But only," Hay stipulated, "if Castle comes prepared to shoot."

"After what you told me—" Tommy began, but left his sentence unfinished.

"And remember," Hay warned him, "Castle is a dashed good shot. No use trying it unless I'm holding his attention—won't help me and may hurt you."

"I'll do my best," said Tommy gravely.

"I might get Putnam mad with me," Hay mused, "so that he'd want to go for me himself. Castle might interfere. That would occupy them both. Then you might get a chance. I'll give you any help I can. Just look out and keep your wits about you. But I'm almost certain Sefton will come, and in that case heaven knows."

"Good Lord," Tommy thought to himself, "it's real—it's real." But all the same he hardly believed it.

"How well you cook bacon," Hay commented a few minutes later. "I never can get Castle to cook it half enough."

Tommy blushed with pleasure, but felt the compliment was undeserved. If the bacon was overcooked and shrivelled almost to nothing—which apparently was how Hay preferred it—it was for the same reason that Alfred's cakes were burnt.

After breakfast Hay began his gentle inquisition. With a question here, a comment there, he led Tommy on to talk of himself, his family and friends, his school

and holidays, his favorite amusements, his present occupation and prospects and hopes.

Tommy chattered on without reserve. He enjoyed Hay's friendly attitude, thought it just amused him to hear him talk, and never guessed how critically every sentence was weighed and considered.

"Either as open as the day, or else the cleverest of the lot," Hay thought.

If only he did not feel so rotten himself he would have had more confidence in his own judgment.

Once or twice Tommy mentioned people Hay knew slightly, or had heard of, sometimes he spoke of places he had visited. It was hardly possible that anyone could lie so freely, so unreservedly and so well. Gradually Hay was more and more convinced that Tommy was a friend, not an extraordinarily artful enemy. Intellectually he was convinced and yet when he asked himself "If he had a fair chance of escape would I risk telling him the whole thing?" he could not be sure that the answer was "Yes."

It seemed strange to Tommy to be talking aimlessly, describing his trivial past and so on; so strange that suddenly he broke off and said, "I say—you know—I can't quite believe it."

"Believe?" asked Hay uncomprehendingly, "believe what?"

"Why that really we are in this hole—and me talking like this."

"Good Lord," said Hay, "how should we talk? A platonic dialogue on the immortality of the soul?"

Tommy felt not quite shocked, but just a little startled.

Hay went on. "It's my hole, in a way, and I'm sorry you're in it. No use labouring that—I am. I'd get you out of it if I could, and if I saw a chance of escape I'd advise you to take it.

"If Sefton comes—and he will unless the thing is very urgent—he may believe you are harmless. That's honestly all the comfort I can see for you."

"It doesn't matter about me," said Tommy quickly, "not really. Not at all."

Hay laughed. "Every little creature loves its life," he murmured flippantly.

"But I say—" Tommy could not keep off the side of the question that really lay nearest his heart— "You *do* believe, don't you—?" He stopped and looked pleading and confused.

"Yes," Hay confessed, "I'm sorry to say I do."

He held out his hand, and Tommy grasped it with an inarticulate murmur of satisfaction and relief.

"I do," Hay went on steadily, "I know you are telling the truth. I know you came meaning to help me."

"I wish I could," Tommy mumbled, inexpressibly touched and humbled.

"Got yourself in the devil of a hole trying." Hay's tone of friendly appreciation went straight to Tommy's heart.

"My telling what they want won't help you," Hay pursued quietly. "They won't hurt you unless because they think you know too much about them. As they

know I do. You see, on the boat when they were bringing me over I heard names of places and of people. Their business would need quite a lot of reorganizing —at least—if I spoke to the police. It all depends what they think you know. I can't save you by answering their silly questions."

"Don't know why you should," Tommy muttered. "Never asked me to come butting in, did you?"

Then suddenly he realised that he was saying the correct—the conventional—the expected thing. Not what he really meant—that it was wicked and unbearable that Hay should die.

"Oh, Hay," he cried, "now you believe in me I can say it. Can't you—why can't you—save yourself?"

Hay shook his head. "I can't, I can't," he repeated obstinately, then added lightly, "and if I could it's too late, I know too much for them to let me go."

A gust of helpless anger swept away Tommy's reserve and diffidence. Here was a thing too uncommon—too vivid—too striking—too—the word forced itself into his mind though he disliked it and denied its exactitude—too beautiful (well no, but certainly too fine)—to be just destroyed by a heavy, stupid brute like Putnam, and hidden out of the way in some damp, rotten hole—buried and lost. He had a sudden vision of a stupid, grinning ape tearing the feathers off a gorgeous bird.

"Why didn't you do it?" he asked petulantly. "If it's too late now, damn it all, why didn't you do it when you could?"

"I'll tell you," Hay answered slowly. "I was living in the South of France with my father and sister. My uncle, whom I'd not seen for years and last heard of in South America, telegraphed from Bristol. Wanted me to go at once. I found him dying. He told me of course. But I hadn't the money to go and look for it myself. So —I'm not, you see, the only one who knows—I told the fellow Cecily is engaged to." (The last faint sparks of Tommy's romance faded painlessly out.)

"She and I were to follow if we could. I was going to fetch her. But he was not to wait. There were reasons why it seemed wiser he should go ahead. In fact, it was doubtful whether we could go at all, as my father was very ill. Besides, I suspected, what I was sure of later, that I was being followed.

"Well, now—to tell where it is would be to give him into their hands—defenceless. They don't know he exists. And these people who want it—Sefton has friends out there, so my uncle told me, who would act on a cable from him. It's a lonely place you see. They'd just wipe out Carter and his party—easily.

"It would be—do you understand?—a most perfect piece of treachery. A deliberate betrayal. Sending him —on my business—to his death. Into a trap, with his eyes shut. Well—I can't—how can I?"

"But Cecily," Tommy urged, not because he really cared for her in comparison with Hay, but because she seemed a useful sort of argument.

"Oh, Cecily," Hay groaned. "It's damned bad luck they've got her. I didn't know they knew I had a sister.

But I can't help it. I think she would approve. I must decide for her. Not fair to tell a girl a thing like that with them wanting to know—"

"I think," Tommy protested, "it's dashed hard on the fellow if he's really keen on her. I'd be sick if I was him, I mean."

"Hang it all!" exclaimed Hay, sharply. "Who cares if he is? I'm not a charitable institution. And one must do one thing or the other.

"Cecily—I have her consent—I would have it—I mean—essentially—I have. I can't explain. I know her rather well, that's all.

"As for Carter's feelings, I'm dashed if I'm going to let them worry me. I've been—don't you see?—in a beastly awkward fix. I've done what seemed to me"—he hesitated for a word—"right" seemed priggish in the context—"what seemed to me necessary. I may be wrong. Anyhow—that's my choice. That's what one has to do—map out a course and stick to it. With people bullying one into—heaven knows—a sort of a stew—one can't keep altering one's plans and reconsidering one's decisions. I was less of a wreck—more myself—when I decided I couldn't tell than I am now. It was *I* took that decision. If I alter now, it's funk—not me. I'm not myself now.

"I daresay Carter won't thank me when he knows—if he ever knows. But hang it all, it's more my show than his."

"I should call it his too in a way," Tommy objected, "in a sort of a way—if you know what I mean."

"Not only that," Hay went on, "the thing becomes

arithmetical. It's Cecily and me against him and his party."

"And what is his party?" Tommy asked.

Hay flinched at the question. "I don't know," he said in an altered tone. Suspicion was reborn for a moment. If this should be one of them that question was straight to the point.

"But I daresay," he went on quietly, "that it won't come to that. Won't be a question of Cecily at all. Sefton wouldn't hurt a fly for nothing. If he realises he can't get the thing from me through her (and he can't, I suppose you see that), he won't want to hurt her in any way. And she knows no more than you do."

The day wore on. Sometimes they talked, sometimes were silent. Tommy felt a growing sense of oppression and discomfort. A sort of load on his chest and an ache behind his eyes that made it difficult to talk of trivialities.

"I say," Hay asked him suddenly. "Can you play chess?"

"I know the moves," Tommy answered modestly.

Hay sighed. "So does Castle. So does everybody. I'll give you a lesson. I'm rather a good player. My father was awfully keen. We caught it if we didn't come up to standard. He used to pick up the board and hit us over the head with it. And then we caught it worse still if we couldn't put back each piece in the right place. Result is both Cecily and I play very well."

"All right," said Tommy submissively, but he had a feeling that Hay would find him an inapt and inatten-

tive pupil. Besides what is the good of a lesson if one is not going to live long enough to learn?

Whether it was fright or stuffiness he didn't know. There was an uncomfortable feeling in his throat and he felt very slightly sick. He could not keep his mind from straying and Hay's story kept recurring, sometimes a series of broken, whispered phrases, sometimes pictures dimly seen in a dark room. He wanted to scream, "They shan't hurt you! I won't have it!" to fight something.

"Where are the men and the board?" he asked.

"Oh, damn!" Hay replied without much feeling, "they are in the next room. But if you have a pencil we can write on scraps of paper.

"Look, the board is here, I marked it out on the floor."

"I've paper," said Tommy, "but no pencil."

"Oh, well, we can fold them up differently. Here, that shape is a king—this a bishop."

There was a draught on the floor and the paper chessmen blew about out of place. Hay laughed irritably. Then Tommy said suddenly, "I wonder what Castle is doing."

Hay did not answer. "Do you want lunch?" he asked; "it must be near lunch time."

"No, I'm not hungry, are you?"

Hay shook his head.

"I can't think," Tommy went on, "how you have kept sane. How long is it since you were outside?"

"I forget," was the answer, "but it was the night I fell off the cliff. Before that the night I tried to swim.

Before that I used to go out on the beach sometimes. That was when I collected the chessmen."

"Good Lord," Tommy grumbled, "I'd have gone potty long ago."

Hay considered him critically. "Perhaps you would," he reflected, "but I think not."

Tommy went on in a tone of acute grievance, "Well, I don't know how you've stood it."

"Stood it!" he laughed and Tommy shuddered. That laugh had hurt him before, now it frightened him.

"I'm not the kind that goes potty," Hay explained. "It's the strong, silent men who bottle up their feelings who do that. I laugh or cry or curse or kick or carry on somehow and—well—look at me."

Tommy laughed. "Oh, God," he muttered, "I wish I could kill them all."

"Listen!" cried Hay sharply, "they are coming."

But it was Putnam, moving in the room above.

Tommy felt positively hysterical. He wanted to say, "I can't bear it if they hurt you," but felt it would be most unutterably silly and futile. At the same time he could think of nothing else to say and felt a desperate need to say something.

Hay too was feeling the strain.

"I wish he'd come," he murmured.

"Who? Castle?" Tommy asked.

"No," Hay's face was white and set, "Sefton."

"Good God," Tommy expostulated, "why?"

"He *will* come, and I'd always rather meet him than wait for him."

"But perhaps," Tommy suggested, "it will only be

Castle. In fact, it *can* only be Castle. Sefton can't come to-day. Castle only telegraphed this morning—it takes two days, doesn't it?"

His heart sank as he spoke—two days of suspense—two days waiting in that petrifying, airless room. Two days—

Hay shook himself suddenly.

"We're playing the fool," he said harshly. "You're stronger than I—than I ever was. See if you can smash the window frame."

"What for? The noise would bring Putnam before I could begin. Besides I'll not leave you."

"God!" cried Hay impatiently, "what good do you think you can be to me? Get away—can't you?"

"No," Tommy replied solemnly, "I can't."

Hay laughed.

"Sorry," he said, "you are right." He looked up at the window. "Hopeless I know. Besides—I do understand."

They were silent a few moments, an uneasy, awkward silence, and then Tommy said, "I wish I'd known you before."

It seemed an odd, sentimental sort of thing to say.

Hay laughed pleasantly. "I wish for your sake you had," he replied, "instead of just now, with the trying circumstances, and the pernicious state of my temper." He smiled deprecatingly at Tommy. "I'm sorry, you know, I'm rather a wreck and detestably irritable. I wish I'd known you sooner."

"I wish you had," Tommy repeated, and again silence settled down on them until he felt he must speak

if only to relieve the tension of his mind and drown the voice of his fear.

They must talk. They simply must, or else he would be too horribly frightened before anything even began to happen.

"I wish you'd tell me about yourself," he ventured. "I've told you quite a lot about me."

"Prythee tell me the story of thy life," Hay quoted mockingly. "It's a dull life, I warn you."

"Never mind," said Tommy, "it's better than sitting here doing nothing."

Hay frowned with vexation. He felt like that himself, but it annoyed him to have the thing so clearly stated. It seemed to emphasize the unreality of their assumed calmness and detachment. Then he laughed. "Oh, well! I was born in South America," he began, "my father, of course, was Scotch—"

"Good Lord, why?" Tommy interrupted.

Hay's eyes widened with startled amusement. Whatever he expected it was not that question.

"Oh, I don't know," he answered lightly, "it was just a way he had. Some people are, you know. Habit, I suppose."

He was rather pleased with that answer.

"I meant 'why, of course,' not 'why Scotch,' " Tommy explained quite patiently.

"Oh, well—" Hay hesitated in answering, "the name, you know—rather points that way."

Tommy blushed as if at a rebuke.

"Yes," he said, "I suppose it does. But you don't look or talk or think like one's idea of a Scotchman."

"He wasn't typical at all. He was half English. Besides my mother was a Spanish-American, and Cecily and I take after her in looks—perhaps in other things too."

He was conscious as he spoke of the unreality, the utter futility of all he was saying, and its complete lack of relation to what he and Tommy were thinking. But yet there was no denying, it *was* better than sitting there doing nothing, though it had vexed him to hear Tommy say so.

"He went out quite young," he went on, "and his only brother, too. My father settled out there, married, made money—and eventually lost it. My uncle never settled to anything. He was always turning up then disappearing on fresh adventure, with fresh schemes and hopes, which never came to anything. We saw very little of him, but Cecily and I used to enjoy hearing him tell tales of lost cities and buried treasures which he meant to find some day.

"We were presently sent back to England to be educated—expensively, as that was just the point when my father had been making money. We began to acquire an expensive education and expensive tastes.

"Then suddenly he cabled to us to join him in the South of France. He'd lost everything, quarrelled with my mother and her people, and was seriously ill.

"The next few years I expect would have struck you as rather sordid—"

"I'm sure nothing about *you* ever would," Tommy thought, but was too shy to say.

"Always moving to avoid debts, living cheaply and nastily. I wanted to go back to South America, as I didn't see how in my semi-educated state I was going to earn the half of a living. But I fancy there were things we hadn't been told, and the old man didn't want Cecily or me tripping over his shady past.

"Cecily—she's pretty—well you saw her—and more. Striking—clever—amusing—a good dancer, and so on. We hoped she would marry money. But most of the marriageable money that came our way was encumbered by some wretched old foreigner—or else some still more wretched young one. And Cecily—quite rightly—is rather fastidious.

"Then Carter turned up. A very decent young American. We met him at a dance. Not a millionaire, or anything dazzling, but quite tolerably well off."

Tommy's sentimental soul was shocked by Hay's materialistic attitude towards such matters.

"But—" he said, "I mean—did she *like* him?"

"Oh, yes. She liked him all right," Hay explained, "not at all a bad sort, and reasonably well off. She couldn't marry a poor man, you see. That was out of the question. I thought as soon as she was settled I'd go back to South America. That would leave my father just about enough to live on—more or less, and barring his rather heedless habits. I felt sure I could make a living out there, and didn't see how to set about it in Europe. Of course I was hoping to make rather more than a living by and by.

"However, my father's health grew worse and worse.

He didn't seem likely to live long. Then there came this telegram from my uncle. It simply said, 'Come at once, dying.'

"I went and found him in a Bristol lodging-house. The landlady wouldn't let me in at first, but put me through a most amazing catechism, about who I was and how I came there. I nearly lost my temper and told her to go to blazes and take my old uncle with her. But afterwards I understood. He had been followed and knew it and wanted to make sure who I was before letting me in.

"Well—I saw him, and he told me."

"What was it?" Tommy asked breathlessly.

"Emeralds," Hay answered. "How many or how come by I don't know.—Bought (unlikely that)—given —stolen—found. But from what he said I fancy it was a good thing. Perhaps one of these hidden and forgotten treasures one hears of sometimes—he told me where it was, how to get there—how to find it. Also told me that 'they' were after him and likely to be after me."

"Who were 'they'?"

"He didn't tell me—He was dying, you know, and not very talkative. But the landlady told me strangers had been enquiring after him.

"So far as I could make out he'd had these things and Sefton or someone to do with him knew or guessed he had them. Sefton, I gather, is rather a big noise out there—hard to deal with on his own ground.

"My uncle realised his danger and hid the damn things—where he told me. They followed, thinking he still had them with him until somehow they got an op-

portunity of searching him and his baggage. Found nothing, of course. Then they knew he must have left them by the way, since he started with and arrived without. They followed him about till he landed in Bristol seriously ill. He didn't tell me all that. I may be wrong about it, I put it together from what he told me and what happened since.

"Next day he died. I arranged his funeral and went to London as it seemed an opportunity to look up a few friends whom I had not seen since I left England. But especially I arranged to meet Carter, who by wonderful good luck was in England on business. He was tremendously keen. Wanted to marry Cecily at once and go off with her. But I didn't like that.

"Finally we settled he should go ahead. (It seemed wiser, because I had an idea I was being watched.) I was to go back to Cecily, and when our father died or recovered we were to follow him if it seemed safe."

A new thought struck him then, he broke off and asked abruptly, "How did you say Cecily was dressed?"

"Long black coat," Tommy replied, "little black hat and grey furs."

"Dead that means," Hay commented matter-of-factly. "Bought for the funeral—or possibly dyed. She had a very decent grey coat. She'd not have chucked away money on a black one for nothing. We never had any to spare."

Again Tommy was hurt. He liked Hay so much that he wanted him to be quite perfect, and every now and then his lack of feeling jarred a little. His discomfort must have been apparent, for Hay explained "He'd been

ill a long time—was very unhappy—discontented, and pretty troublesome. Of course we'd rather he got well, but I gather that wasn't at all likely—and until he did one thing or the other either Cecily or I had to keep hanging round. And his temper was vile—like mine only worse."

"Go on," said Tommy, "what happened next?"

"Carter started off—at least I suppose so. Wouldn't it be a sell if something had happened to detain him and he was in England still? But it's not likely. I didn't see him again, but arranged for him to send me news if he wanted to. Only we agreed he shouldn't unless it was really important.

"As for me, the night before I intended crossing over to France I heard a noise outside my bedroom, got up to see what it was, and was knocked out as I opened the door. I came to inside a beastly little sailing-boat, with Daly sitting on my head, so to speak. Then they landed me here one dark night—I've told you the rest. Until you told me, I didn't even know where I was.

"Of course it was easy for them to get hold of Cecily. She'd come at once if she thought I was ill or in trouble. She had no reason to think anyone wanted anything of her."

"But I don't see," Tommy objected, "how they knew her name or address."

"Nor do I exactly, but it wouldn't really be difficult if they knew anything of my uncle or his family. There are plenty of unsuspicious old aunts and cousins who would be pleased and flattered to answer questions about Cecily and me—jolly, attractive kids you know, in our

schooldays. Too easy—just call on great-aunt Jemina and say, 'We met your charming nephew in South America'—she'd soon tell him all he could want—and more too."

"But they may know of your meeting with Carter—they may be following him already," Tommy suggested.

Hay shook his head. "I have thought of that, but if so, why fag so much with me? Putnam might—but he's only an underling. Sefton rather likes me. Doesn't find this any fun. Besides he's not the kind to waste effort.

"Besides no one in England had ever heard of Carter or the engagement. I only saw him once myself and then took all sorts of precautions.

"No—Carter has a clear start—at least I hope so. I am forced to presume so."

"But I say—" Tommy asked him, "what is he like, this fellow Carter? Is he worth it?"

Hay hesitated, then answered gravely, "Worth more than a coward who would give him away."

Again Tommy felt a hot rush of helpless anger.

"It's pride," he said, "just pride. You are not fond of him. You don't care what happens to him or how he feels so long as you don't betray him and hurt your own damned pride."

Hay answered thoughtfully. "Pride—yes. Pride, I suppose. Honour. Whatever you like to call it."

"But if Carter were here—" Tommy began protestingly.

Hay interrupted irritably. "If Carter were here, he's a decent sort of fellow, and I suppose would behave like anyone else. But he isn't."

"Like anyone else!" Was Hay describing himself? Tommy wondered.

"You're the pluckiest thing on God's earth," he said, with a sort of exasperated admiration, realising that it was useless to try to explain his feeling of disgust that a thing like Hay should be sacrificed for a thing like Carter, for whom he had conceived a totally unreasonable dislike.

"Flattery is good for me," laughed Hay. "Acts like a tonic."

"But do you *like* him?"

"Like?" Hay's laugh seemed to imply that in his set one did nothing so emotional. "Like? Why he is Cecily's fiancé, not mine; but I've taken his money and sent him across the world on my business. It would be pretty low to give him away."

"But good God!" Tommy exclaimed, "if he comes back with the things and finds you and Cecily both dead. Just imagine—good Lord!—*try* to imagine—if you were him and in love with Cecily, what would you feel about a fellow who had her ill-treated and killed when you were out of the way on his business and couldn't interfere, so as not to put him—I mean you—into a little extra danger.

"Honestly now—if you were Carter—if you see what I mean. Well, then—what would you want *you*—I mean Hay—to be doing now? Have you no imagination at all? How's he going to feel about it?"

"You don't understand," Hay answered. "I'd not betray him for myself. And Cecily would not for herself.

Why should I then for her, or she for me? If I asked her she could decently only say no.

"I'm sorry for Carter, when I think of him—which isn't often—but I'm dashed if I see a way of conducting this business that is going to be jolly for everybody."

"But I say," Tommy protested, "he may not be there. He may not have started. Or he may be coming back and out of danger—"

Hay looked at him sombrely. "I think not. You told me the date. Well—I suppose he'll be just about getting there now. And in that case—if Sefton cables to his friends they'll meet him—there. And it's not—as you say 'a little extra danger.' It's a certainty. A trap," Hay laughed. "And on my part—a most priceless piece of treachery."

## CHAPTER XIV

### SUSPENSE

TOMMY did not answer. He was beaten and knew it. Given Hay's character the thing was inevitable. It was no use weighing probabilities or pointing out chances. To Hay the choice was simply between honour and dishonour, between what a decent sort of fellow could and could not do. The only question was how much they could inflict and how much he could stand; whether his nerve and will would hold out to the last, or whether they would give under the strain.

Unquestionably Tommy was a sentimentalist. If Hay had professed for Carter a lively affection, or something like the passionate admiration which he himself felt for Hay, he would have found the situation more bearable. But the cold austerity of this sacrifice for honour and pride frightened him. How easy it would be to forfeit Hay's good opinion—to fall short of his standard of how a decent sort of fellow would behave. He wanted Hay's good opinion at the moment more than anything on earth.

"Perhaps Mogridge will turn up first," he suggested at last.

"Perhaps," Hay acceded absently.

He was not listening, so Tommy pressed the point. "He promised he would come or send as soon as ever he could."

"We're dished anyway," said Hay, quietly. "If he comes—if any stranger comes—it's sudden death for me"—he smiled rather wistfully at Tommy, and concluded simply—"and most likely, for you too."

"Something will turn up," Tommy insisted, "it must."

"It may," was the gloomy answer, "but I don't see what. I believe they have people in their pay ashore who'd warn them if any stranger arrived in the district. At any rate they seem pretty confident they'd know of anything in time to kill me and get away. You got through, of course, because you were expected—as Dawson. They'll have word of Mogridge's coming, and be on the lookout. And if he makes for the island—they aren't taking any chances."

"But it can't—" Tommy insisted desperately—"it simply *can't* happen."

He was absolutely in earnest, and meant every word. Hay shook his head, "Anything can happen," he muttered.

Tommy checked the answer that rose in his mind. "But not to me!" because he knew it would be a ridiculous thing to say, and yet he felt, with frantic certainty that the worst could never happen to Tommy Wood. It was no use arguing. People like him were not murdered on uninhabited islands and hidden in holes.

Early in the afternoon the light began to fade and dusk close in.

"Let's have the lamp and make some tea," Hay suggested.

Tommy reddened with distress. "There's no lamp in the room," he said.

What a fool he had been not to think of that when Castle had brought the other things!

And yet, now he remembered what Castle had said, "Make breakfast for him—lunch too, if I am not back." He was aware suddenly that Castle had not expected to be away so long. Was something moving at the other end? Had Sefton failed to answer the telegram?

"I thought Castle would be back before this," he said, by way of excuse.

"It gets dark so early," Hay commented vaguely. He too was puzzled by Castle's long absence. "Never mind," he went on, pulling himself together, "never mind the lamp. What about tea?"

"All right," said Tommy.

Then suddenly the sight of Hay's queer, pale, smiling face struck him anew with an unbearable pang of pity and distress.

"I'd like to murder the lot!" he exclaimed.

Hay answered lightly, "Oh, cut it out! Cut out the emotion and let's have tea. For God's sake don't let's put too much feeling into the picnic."

Tommy knew that he was horribly frightened.

They drank their tea, and the light slowly faded out. They were silent now, both at the end of their resources, both terribly uneasy.

The darkness gathered like a tangible thing, and as it grew Tommy became more and more aware of the

closeness of the room. It felt as though the walls were closing in—drawing nearer—making it impossible to breathe.

At last he spoke. "I say—why doesn't Castle come back?"

"I don't know," Hay answered in a lower, frightened voice. "I don't understand."

"I say—I'm fearfully scared—aren't you?" Tommy could not say it, because he knew Hay would hate to hear it said, but he could think of nothing else. It seemed impossible to start any subject of conversation, to forget for an instant that they were waiting—simply waiting.

And yet the silence was terrifying, the tension of their minds unbearable. If nothing happened soon he would have to say something, however fatuous. Comment on the continuous rain or the increasing darkness —or scream. Yes, scream if nothing happened. Each moment he was waiting for the next to bring some intolerable climax.

"I shall scream—I shall yell—I shall make some hideous remark about the weather in a minute—a minute —a minute—"

A sound outside—a key in the door of the cottage. Tommy caught his breath and then instinctively he looked at Hay, who seemed to have drawn himself together, listening—attentive. In the dim light Tommy saw him smile.

A man's voice spoke in the passage outside.

"Sefton," Hay shaped the name, but his voice was inaudible. Another voice—a woman's—and Hay, on a

sharply indrawn breath said, "Cecily!" and in a broken whisper, "Oh, my God!"

He clutched Tommy's arm, and whispered again faintly, "My God, my God!"

"He'll faint," thought Tommy, "I know he's going to faint."

The door opened, and suddenly the little room was full of people.

With a sharp cry Cecily sprang forward.

"Oh, Ben—dearest—" she moaned and sank beside him on the floor. He leaned towards her and she kissed him. She was almost on top of Tommy, but took no notice of him at all.

"Cecily," Hay whispered, "not a scene, please. Good Lord, you'll make me cry myself."

She drew away from him, kneeling but with straight back and head held up. She bit her lip and smiled. They understood each other perfectly, but it was easy to see which was the dominant spirit. She could not have spoken without crying, and so she was silent, all her questions unasked.

"Cecily," he said softly, "you must trust me. There's no way but to trust me. Do you understand?"

She nodded speechless.

"Rotten luck for you," he went on gently, "dashed rotten—"

And then from the dark and undistinguished crowd that filled the tiny room a voice spoke; that smooth and pleasant voice that Tommy had heard in the upstairs room in Queen Elizabeth Place—the voice which he now knew was Sefton's.

"Bring a light," it said, "there is no time to waste."

"I can't explain—trust me," Hay sighed below his breath, and Cecily answered, scarcely able to find voice enough to speak at all:

"I will. I always do."

Next moment the lamp in the doorway shone full on Hay's face, throwing shadows that accentuated the hollows. Cecily caught her breath with a sob.

"Oh, my darling," she cried, "what have they done to you?"

"Don't," he whispered, "don't."

He laughed then, and she laughed too. They laughed together, looking into each other's eyes. It seemed to Tommy that her laugh was the echo and her eyes the reflection of his.

"She will do anything he makes her," he thought. Hay drew his hand from her and shaded his eyes, then looking past her he smiled. Tommy followed the direction of his look and saw that Sefton had come forward holding a bright table lamp with a reflector.

For a moment there might have been only these two in the room, so utterly did their antagonism dominate all other feeling. Hay's smile was challenging—defiant—insolent almost, while Sefton looked him over with confidence just tinged with amusement—a plucky child ready to show fight in hopeless circumstances:

"He has no doubt of the issue," Tommy thought, "and Hay won't allow even to himself that he has any."

"Well, young Hay," said Sefton, in his pleasant voice, "I think we have you now."

"You have had me a long time," Hay answered on a

level tone, "and it hasn't done you much good."

"Better give in at once," Sefton went on, "we are in a position to make you."

"Oh, no, I think not," said Hay steadily, "and you are surely too clever to think so yourself."

Sefton's eyes shifted to Cecily.

Hay laughed. "Where did you learn your psychology?" he asked mockingly. He had himself well in hand and went on slowly and deliberately, "I have never repented at the sight of my mother's portrait. We are none of us, Sefton, quite as dashed simple as all that. I see that behaving like a villain in a melodrama has gone to your head at last. You expect the rest of us to fall into the other parts. 'He did it to save a woman,' I suppose that's the sort of phrase that's running in your head." He must surely have felt uneasy under the confident scrutiny of those steady eyes, cold, threatening—amused. "Besides," he added defiantly. "I don't know." Said like that it was an insult, it was so patently untrue.

"Cecily, dear," he went on, lowering his voice, but still speaking without emotion, "we are in for it, you and I."

"Yes, dear," she whispered, laying her hand on his.

"Well—just remember—few people really enjoy their last illness. It can't be helped."

"Oh, Ben," she gasped.

"Well—we, I take it, are practically on our own deathbeds. Bad luck—but it can't be helped. Think of it that way. I'm afraid we are in for a rotten time. I can't save you—I can't help you."

"I—don't want you to," she could hardly get the words out.

Hay laughed and challenged them all.

"Here is a model for all subsequent sisters. Can you beat it? Pity anything so good should die so young!"

Then Sefton, apparently for the first time, caught sight of Tommy, sitting on the floor, uncomfortably wedged between Hay, his sister and the wall.

"Who's that?" he asked.

"That," hesitated Castle, "that's what I was telling you about."

"Dawson? The sham Dawson? What's he doing here? What on earth have you put him in here for? Aren't there any more rooms in the house?"

Castle murmured something apologetic.

"Putnam," Sefton went on, "you can take him to the other back room. Wait a little, I'll come too. These two can be shut in here for the moment. There's no harm they can do."

Hay looked at Tommy and smiled.

Something—perhaps the cessation of boredom or the promise of a contest had done him good. He was less pale—less languid—altogether more alive. It seemed a little brutal to say he was showing off, but was it perhaps that? Certainly he was very conscious that Sefton was watching him.

Tommy for the life of him could think of nothing to say.

"Good-bye, good luck!" Hay called to him gaily, "and thanks most awfully for all your trouble."

That was all.

The room across the passage was even smaller and darker than the one he had just left. It was indeed little more than a cupboard, full of dust and cobwebs.

Sefton came in with him, looked about and said: "Yes, all right," went out again and shut the door.

"Good-bye, good luck and thanks for all your trouble."

They locked the door and left him alone, and he remembered that Sefton had said, "There is no time to waste."

Everything seemed quiet in the room opposite. He heard footsteps going upstairs.

"No time to waste—"

It was unexpected, this pause in things—so unexpected that he was dismayed by it. He was alone in one room, Hay and his sister alone in another. What were they doing, the rest of them, who had gone upstairs? What could they be doing that was not waste of time?

He remembered what Hay had said, "He will spring one thing on me—then another—a hundred—till I have told him or till I am dead!"

What were they doing? What was happening? What was going to happen?

"No time to waste—" and yet time was crawling—crawling emptily by.

He tried the door, he examined the window and sat down again without hope. For the first time he began to feel seriously frightened about himself. Till now his

mind had been held and charmed and occupied by Hay. Now he remembered himself and his own danger.

"Hay thinks they will kill me—" Kill—he could not realise it. He recoiled and shrank from the idea. It was simply impossible that he should be murdered in a stuffy cupboard like this. Murdered and hidden in some deep cave or hole in the rocks. Mogridge would come and find no trace. His friends would never know.

"No time to waste—"

And still it was quiet over the way, and still he was alone in the dark, stuffy little hole and time was creeping, creeping steadily by. What were they doing? What could they be doing in the room upstairs?

"No time to waste—"

And then he remembered Hay's eager pleading with him for Cecily. "Putnam—Sefton—they'll stop at nothing!" and again another phrase he had used, "*Anything* can happen."

He was appalled to feel himself on the edge of a precipice. Nothing was beyond the limit—nothing was against the rules, Putnam and Sefton would draw the line at nothing. He remembered Hay's shuddering horror when he had begged him to save his sister, and he understood it.

There was no limit—except—thank God—there was a time limit, for Mogridge had said, "I'll come or send as soon as I can."

And Hay had said that Mogridge's coming would mean sudden death.

That was the other limit—nature's limit—death.

And Sefton had said there was no time to waste.

He lost his head and flung himself against the door. then kicked it savagely again and again.

Goodness! The noise he was making must be heard all over the house, but no one was taking any notice. That gave him the measure of the futility of his behaviour, and yet he went on, simply to relieve his rage and fear, until he was hot and breathless, then sat down again and waited with his head in his hands.

## CHAPTER XV

### CONFLICT

At last the door upstairs opened and Tommy heard steps coming down. Just outside his room they paused, and there were whispering voices.

"It's come," he thought, "it's come, it's come."

The key turned, the door opened and a dark figure stepped in. There was no light even in the passage now. Some hours must have passed and night succeeded dusk.

"No time to waste," Tommy thought. Then what had they been doing all this while?

He drew back into the corner, thinking, "If I can't see his face, he shan't see mine."

He was uncertain which of them it was, he tried to remember their individual build.

Not Castle, who was thin and slight.

"No time to waste," and yet that dark shape stood motionless in the doorway.

Putnam? Was it broad enough? Daly? Perhaps. Sefton? Surely he was taller?

Then his uncertainty ended, for Sefton's voice said abruptly: "Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"Oh, what a fool I've been," thought Tommy with a hot rush of shame. "Of course he was bound to ask that question and I haven't thought out what I meant to say. Fool! Fool!"

He simply remained silent, feeling helpless and unhappy.

"If you don't answer," Sefton went on, "we shall be forced to act on our own assumptions."

It was spoken like a threat. What would their assumptions be? Rapid thinking was never his strong point. Had they heard from Dawson? How much? If anything to speak of, a lie was practically useless.

"And our assumption is that there is no time to lose."

A swift flash illuminated Tommy's mind. "Their assumption is that there is no time to waste, because I am acting with others, who are following and know where to come. That he and his party must, as Hay put it, bury him and run before my friends or the police arrive. They've not seen Dawson then, or they'd know more.

"The only helpful kind of lie is to pretend I am in this alone and that consequently there is no hurry. We may gain time that way. Yes, time is on our side, for Mogridge does know and he will do something."

"What do you mean?" Tommy asked blankly, already beginning to act on the principle that it was up to him to waste all the time he could.

"Tell me who you are and how you came here?" Sefton repeated.

Yes, one must appear isolated. But how invent a good, coherent, complicated and serviceable lie at such short notice? The truth was his only chance—but the truth with certain omissions. The truth without any word of Mogridge. He plunged into a confused narrative, as near facts as was possible, without any mention of his

friend—a narrative that he felt must carry conviction because he was able to repeat so much of the private conversation between Daly and Sefton.

"And then Daly shut the window, and I couldn't hear any more—so I came away."

"Daly's a fool," was Sefton's comment. "Fancy letting her get the key and then not missing it till next morning."

This sounded like belief. Tommy's heart thumped with triumph. He—Tommy Wood—had told a lie to a clever rascal and got away with it. He wished Mogridge could have heard him or, better still, Hay.

But that was not the end.

"Go on," said Sefton, "what happened next?"

"Next?" Tommy faltered, "next? Why next I went home to bed."

"But how did you know enough to come here?"

Tommy snatched joyfully at the opportunity of wasting more time. His description of his botanical research was detailed and bewildering.

"Good," murmured Sefton, "not at all bad. And how did you get Dawson's bag and letter?"

Oh, curse the bag and the letter! Tommy had forgotten those. He wondered whether Sefton knew the truth, and was just leading him on to see what he would say next. Well, if so there was nothing to lose. Besides—"No time to waste—" it was up to him to waste all the time he could.

He gave the only answer that occurred to him. "How? Why I took it from Dawson in the train."

"And Dawson? Where is he now?"

"Oh holy snakes! I'm done now," thought Tommy, "I'll never answer that convincingly without mentioning Moggy!"

Again he snatched at a moment's delay. "Where? Good heavens—I don't know."

"Don't know?" Sefton asked with a slight menace in his tone.

"No, don't know." Tommy replied; then with one of his perversely ingenious flashes of inspiration. "You see, as we were going through a tunnel I just opened the door and pushed him out."

It was hateful and unsatisfactory telling a full-sized lie in the dark, because the other fellow's face gave one no hint whether he was believing it or not.

"Where was that?" Sefton asked, and his voice too betrayed nothing.

"The Severn Tunnel, of course," Tommy answered irritably, "where else do you suppose?"

Sefton made no comment. Tommy saw him turn slightly, and heard someone speaking in the passage, heard too the door of the room opposite where Hay and Cecily were waiting unlocked, opened and shut.

"All right," Sefton said, "I'll come. Bring this fellow too. We can tie his hands so that we needn't worry about him. You have plenty of string, I suppose?"

Daly came in. Tommy reflected miserably that Douglas Fairbanks would have knocked him down, jumped over Sefton and escaped; but for him to resist two men of their build would be hopeless and absurd. Besides with Hay and Cecily in the next room and no help nearer

than the mainland there was obviously nothing in it. He submitted meekly with a sinking heart.

Daly led him across the dark passage into the other room. Its atmosphere struck him like a blow as he came in, for besides its natural stuffiness a large oil-lamp was smoking slightly on a nail on the wall.

Putnam and Castle stood waiting near the door. Castle was white and worried looking and Putnam's dull face wore a look of hateful satisfaction.

Cecily was sitting on the ground by her brother, she had taken off her hat and coat, which lay in a heap on the floor, but her hair was tidy and her face thickly powdered. Tommy knew beyond possibility of doubt that Hay had issued orders to that effect. She was holding his hand, staring ahead with wide dark eyes and tight shut mouth.

"He dominates her," Tommy thought, "she will die for his principles without even knowing what they are." An odd analogy struck him. He wondered in times of religious persecution how many people were martyred for the beliefs of others. Seeing Tommy, Hay smiled his pleasantest and friendliest.

"Will you accept my apology?" he said, "I have said unpardonable things. Cecily corroborates your story in every respect. Not, of course, that it needed that, I believed in you before she came—"

"Oh, Hay," Tommy murmured shamefacedly.

"Of course I have no doubt of you now. Not the least—not the faintest. I want to thank you, and tell you I am sorry."

"That's all right," said Tommy awkwardly.

Hay laughed a nervous apology. "You really must forgive me. They have tried so many tricks on me, I hardly believe my eyes or ears. Please don't think I don't appreciate—"

Tommy was spared further blushes by Sefton, who came forward and stood in front of Hay. Again their antagonism seemed to fill the room. Cecily, Putnam, Daly, Castle, Tommy himself might all have been part of an elaborately painted background. For a few seconds they were silent. Like two fencers they seemed to Tommy, both watchful, both waiting on guard, neither anxious to begin. Then Sefton opened with a fierce attack.

"Now, Hay," he said, "we have had enough nonsense. There is no time to waste. We leave this place early tomorrow morning and we mean before we leave it you shall tell us all we wish to know."

Hay like the weaker swordsman was guarding—delaying.

"What exactly is it you want me to tell?"

Sefton ignored the feint. "You will have told us before morning," he said, "surely you can see that?" He stepped nearer, threatening and then deliberately looked from him to Cecily

"I'll not tell you, Sefton," Hay answered, still sombrely on the defensive, "I'll not tell you, and I think you know it."

He lowered his voice and spoke slowly, "I think you know it as well as I do."

Tommy noticed that he had dropped the pretence of not knowing.

Sefton shook his head. "I know you will," he said, "and you already are afraid you may."

Hay laughed at that. "Speak out," he challenged Sefton, "speak out and tell us plainly what you mean to do to her?"

In his softest voice, Sefton answered: "I'd rather not touch her; I hope there will be no need."

He looked about, as though to see that the field was fair and suitable. He seemed to find it overcrowded. "Tie his feet," he said to Putnam, with a glance towards Tommy, "he can sit on that old box in the corner by the fireplace."

Tommy saw that Cecily was beginning to cry afresh, and that Hay was not looking at her or attempting to stop her. His eyes, watchful and apprehensive, were fixed on Sefton. Castle, with undisguised hatred, was staring at Putnam whose satisfaction was evident.

"I don't want her there," Sefton went on, indicating Cecily. "Daly, you'd better get her a chair over by the door."

She clung to her brother's hand with both of hers, her look was a wild entreaty—"Let me scream! Let me fight! Oh, don't force me to go on behaving like this!"

He spoke to her in a low voice. "There's nothing left to say that I can say at the moment. You understand. What you don't know, you will presently, if you get away." He looked round at his enemies with a challenging smile. "I can't express myself in any detail, can I?"

She bit her lip and smiled, but the next moment when

Daly took her by the arm and said: "Come along," she screamed and resisted.

"Go along," her brother commanded, "don't make a scene." His tone was curt and summary. She rose dizzily to her feet. He smiled then when she looked back at him, and said quite gently, "Be brave. Remember no one really enjoys their last illness."

"Oh, Ben!" she choked, in an effort to turn a sob into a laugh, and let Daly lead her to the chair he had placed beside the door.

"Keep her there," Sefton said to Daly. "And now Castle," he went on, "you put on all those splints and bandages on his arm, you had better take them off."

Castle looked imploringly at Sefton, but saw no relenting in his face. He moved unsteadily from where he had been standing, near the fireplace, across the room to Hay.

"Get on with it," said Sefton, seeing him hesitate.

"Poor old Castle—cheer up." Hay's low voice and friendly smile cut Castle like a knife, as indeed it was intended they should. His hands shook, a mist gathered before his eyes.

"Get on," Sefton repeated, "no need to be so scared of hurting him. He won't notice it presently."

"Sefton—" there was an unspoken appeal in Hay's voice and look—"Sefton, I'll not tell you, and I think you know it."

"You will tell me one way or another," Sefton replied, "I try this first."

He took hold of the injured arm. Hay flinched at the first touch.

"Does that hurt?" Sefton asked him mockingly.

"Not in the least," Hay answered, "pure funk."

It was a splendid piece of bravado, but the next moment he cried out and struck Sefton in the face with the other hand.

Castle backed away and leant against the wall, Cecily half rose, but Daly held her and she sank again on to her chair.

It was evident that Sefton knew what he was about, his hands moved gently, he used no violence, but Hay screamed again and again and swore furiously in a mixture of English and Spanish. Tommy shut his eyes, feeling actually sick. He wished to goodness he could shut his ears too, or that Hay wouldn't make such a noise about it.

"Can't you hold him, Castle?" he heard Sefton say in a tone of annoyance, "I want him kept still—well Putnam, then, if Castle can't."

"He's had enough," Castle pleaded, "he's going to faint."

"Not yet," Sefton answered, "he's all right, I'm watching him."

At last Hay's cries died down to a faint moaning and Tommy opened his eyes.

He could not see Hay, for Sefton was between, bending over him, but he saw Cecily sitting upright with locked hands, a colourless face and great black eyes staring at her brother and Daly beside her with a restraining hand on her shoulder. Putnam, dimly seen in the darkest corner of the room, was kneeling by Hay, and Castle leaned, white and trembling, against the wall.

Suddenly Tommy felt as if he were going to faint himself. It seemed an odd, irrelevant sort of thing to do. He bent down with his head on his knees. For a moment sight and sound were blurred—a brown haze and a confused buzzing, and then, far away he heard Sefton's voice:

"Will you tell now?"

And Hay's reply came in a tone of breathless fury, "I'll see you all damned!"

Sefton stooped lower, and Hay shrieked and cursed him again.

"For God's sake tell—for God's sake tell!" was the only thought Tommy could frame.

And then Sefton, almost tenderly, "Shall I go on?"

"Damn you!" Hay sobbed, and then gave a low, sharp cry.

"Shall I do that again?"

And from Hay an exhausted moan, "No—no—stop."

"Will you tell?"

"Yes."

Tommy had been praying for it, and yet it came as a shock. He cared nothing for Carter and a great deal for Hay, but this victory of the flesh in its age-long conflict with the spirit affected him like an overwhelming catastrophe. He felt an immense pity for Hay in his defeat. The moment was utterly tragic.

Cecily must have felt something of the same. With a little gasp she buried her face in her hands and seemed to shrink back into herself. Castle sighed and breathed deep, panting as if after severe physical exercise. Sefton's look was harder to read, for a moment it was pity

and surprise, as though he had not expected to win so easily. "Great heavens," he seemed to think, "I did not realise it was as bad as all that." Then his face clouded. Perhaps he was disappointed in Hay, perhaps disgusted with himself. One could only have said with certainty that he was not happy.

Hay lay back with his eyes shut, breathless and exhausted.

"Give him some brandy," Sefton commanded. Castle groped blindly for the bottle and glass, so that Sefton, impatient at his delay and clumsiness, fetched it himself.

Hay opened his eyes, drank, and stared up at Sefton with wide, expressionless eyes. He was silent for so long that Sefton bending over him said kindly:

"Well? You are going to tell us."

"Yes—a few minutes—" Hay gasped, and again they waited.

"Come," Sefton urged him after a minute or two, "get on with it."

"It hurts," Hay complained, "I'd talk easier if you'd give me something to stop it—Castle has some stuff—"

"All right," Sefton promised him, "when you have told us Castle shall do all he can."

Hay drew his hand across his face, plastering his wet hair in dark streaks over his forehead.

"Oh, Lord—" he muttered, "Tell you first?"

"Yes. It won't take long."

"Good Lord. Some more brandy then."

Sefton gave it to him, then said encouragingly, "Now, get on with it. What was it your uncle told you?"

"I'm thinking—" Hay murmured.

"Come, come," Sefton insisted, "get it over. There's nothing to think about."

Hay shook his head. "Yes—lots, I'd tell you at once —only—you see—" there was a long pause. Hay raised himself a little, looking straight at Sefton. "You see —I've promised to tell you—and I've not got a lie ready."

The answer was totally, shatteringly unexpected.

"Great heavens!" cried Sefton in undisguised admiration.

Cecily at the same moment broke into a long peal of hysterical laughter that ended in uncontrollable sobbing and Tommy gasped, not knowing whether he was relieved or appalled. Castle twisted his hands together and exclaimed: "No, no!" in protest against the horror of the situation, and Putnam's face lit up, and he cried exultantly:

"You'll not tell—he says he'll not tell!"

Hay turned to him defiantly. "Not the truth, never the truth; any number of lies—if only I can think of them—" his voice weakened as he said to Sefton, "I promised to tell—not to tell the truth. Wait—while I think of a lie."

Then Sefton spoke very gently. "It's not exactly a question of telling," he said, "just point us out the exact place. Look, here is a large scale map of the district. You need not speak. Just show me the place."

The sight of the map had an extraordinary effect upon Hay, he started and shuddered violently, looking like death.

"Great God!" he muttered breathlessly, "Oh, my God, my God!"

"You see," Sefton went on, "we know already practically everything."

Hay moaned and covered his face with his arm.

"It's easy," Sefton insisted, "easy for us to telegraph to our friends to look out for strangers. They can hardly miss your friends if we do. But we are ready to make terms in order to save trouble and to give a lot for a little.

"We are quite satisfied that your sister and this fellow know nothing to matter. We can arrange for them to go unhurt. You can save their lives. That's something, isn't it?"

Hay's eyes wandered to Tommy, with an uncertain troubled look.

"Oh, Hay," said Tommy miserably, "don't worry about me. Do just as you like."

"You're not strong yourself," Sefton went on, "you probably can't stand much more; but this is all a joke to the time they'll have unless you take this way of saving them."

Hay looked up at Sefton.

"But how?" he said. "We can't trust each other. They must be safe first. And you can't trust me. We've both lied—cheated—so often."

"But I say," Tommy protested, "if you wouldn't to save yourself and your sister."

"She's different," Hay interposed shortly.

"I mean," was Tommy's lame conclusion, "it doesn't really matter about me."

Hay drew his hand across his eyes. "Dashed awkward fix all along," he murmured, "must decide—act—as seems to me—

"No one else knows all I do."

"I won't pretend," Sefton went on, "that I can see how we can avoid killing you. Honestly I wish I did."

"He can promise," Castle cried eagerly in bitter distress, "he can promise he won't tell anything he knows."

"Oh, yes, promise," said Hay contemptuously. "Yes, I can promise. D'you think I'd feel bound by it though? I wouldn't. A promise made like this." He laughed weakly; again Tommy saw that Sefton was pleased. He remembered that Hay had said, "One doesn't always hate one's enemy," and realised that though there was bitter antagonism between these two there was no hatred.

"Come," Sefton said, "own yourself beaten. There's not much left to tell, and I offer you terms."

"Terms—how can there be terms when we can't trust each other?" Hay asked despairingly.

Sefton smiled, "You'll have to trust me, I'm afraid. I'll not let you down. Why should I? They know nothing to matter. We leave early in the morning, show us the exact place and answer the few questions I shall then ask and I promise you an easy death, and that no harm shall come to these two.

"One way or another you will tell us before daylight."

The uncertainty in Hay's eyes was tragic and cruel. He gave a groaning cry as if in pain, raised his hand and let it fall again with a gesture of despair.

"Give me time," he pleaded earnestly, "Let me think. This is—a blow."

"Time is just what we can't spare," said Sefton.

The sight of Hay's distress was unbearable to Tommy, still more so, if possible, to Castle, who broke in wishing to comfort him. "They won't be in any worse danger if you tell; less in fact, because you see, Carter—"

"Carter!" Hay screamed the name, then looked at Tommy, his look a vehement accusation, "Carter! I wondered how you knew so much! Carter! And I told him I trusted him. Carter!"

He turned away as though from something the sight of which was unbearable shame.

Tommy understood that look of sick repulsion. "I didn't—I swear I didn't," he cried.

Hay looked up at Sefton, as though he found him a pleasanter object. Looked up at him imploringly and began. "Sefton—for God's sake—" not knowing what he meant to ask, then shuddered and caught his breath with a sob.

"Kill us all," he cried hysterically, "and *that* too!"

Tommy remembered Hay's phrase, "a perfect piece of treachery," and understood his agony of shame.

"Dear—what?" Cecily asked suddenly, raising her head. He looked at her and made a despairing gesture with his hand.

"They know," he said, "there is nothing left to tell."

"But—but—I don't understand."

Hay looked at Tommy who burst out indignantly. "But I tell you, I didn't. How could I? Hang it all, just

think it over. Did you tell me the name of any single place? Did you even give me a hint?"

Hay's look was almost indifferent in its utter contempt. "No," he answered, "but what I did tell you, repeated would give them more than a hint."

Castle broke in eagerly, "We know," he said, "you admit it. Tell the rest—it's very little more—"

"And for a great profit," said Hay bitterly. "Oh, God! even Judas brought back the thirty pieces."

"But dear—are you sure?" asked Cecily. "Surely they might have learnt some other way?"

"Not Carter's name," Hay answered, "I mentioned it is no one but him," his voice sounded weary, in utter disgust. "He is not one of them, I see that. He came as a friend—that is the truth. He is just a traitor."

"Confound you, you're the blasted limit!" Tommy muttered, furiously.

Hay turned again to Sefton, and spoke very sadly without animosity.

"No, I'll not tell you. Not even the little you still need to know. I am quite enough ashamed."

Sefton leant down towards him. Probably he had no thought of touching him, but Hay's nerves were in rags. He shrank away with a cry and put up his hand defensively. It was the last straw for Castle.

He fired suddenly, and Sefton fell forward with a choking gasp, across Hay's knees, tried to raise himself, sank again, struggled a few seconds and was still.

## CHAPTER XVI

### CATASTROPHE AND SEQUENCE

For a few moments no one moved or spoke. Castle, more surprised than anyone, supported himself dizzily against the wall. Hay, with great fascinated eyes, watched his enemy die. Putnam stared in blank, open-mouthed astonishment.

"He's dead," cried Hay suddenly. "Look—look! He's dead," and laughed from sheer excitement.

"He's dead," Daly repeated, then turning sharply towards Castle, "he's dead. You have killed him."

"Dead?" Castle echoed. "Dead? Sefton dead." He kept repeating under his breath, "Dead—Sefton dead—Sefton," as though he could not grasp the meaning of what he said.

Then Putnam, as though some spring had been released in his slow brain, cried out in hysterical hatred, "You little beast, you'll pay for every word you've ever spoken!" He struck Hay in the face, and seizing his arm gave it a savage wrench. Castle, with a sob, raised his hand to fire again, but Daly was upon him with one spring, grappling for the pistol. At the same moment Cecily rose to her feet, a pale, silent fury with dark eyes, and snatched down the oil-lamp from the nail above her head. The next instant she had dashed it at

Putnam with all her strength. He heard her behind him and turned, but too late to defend himself. The lamp shattered in his face, just as he was rising from his knees. He sprang up, with a shriek of rage and pain, the oil running down his clothes and setting them alight.

Daly left Castle and turned to the help of Putnam. He caught the rug from Hay and used it to crush out the flames. In his haste he flung Cecily aside. She stumbled across the little room, which was pitch dark now that the light was out, and fell literally on top of Tommy, so that the packing case on which he was sitting collapsed, and they both rolled on the floor.

"Quick, quick, untie my hands," he whispered.

Her swift response pleased him. He could feel her fingers in the dark working at the knot.

"Quick, be quick!" he urged her in a frenzy of helplessness.

Daly had thrown Putnam down in his efforts to put out the flames, and the two of them seemed to cover the floor, Putnam groaning, cursing and threatening vengeance, and Daly bending over him, anxious to know the extent of the damage.

"Get a light, Castle," cried Daly, "and come here and see to Putnam."

"I'll not;" Castle replied thickly. "Get it yourself. See to him yourself."

"Let me get at him, just let me get at him," Putnam shouted furiously.

Cecily, having released Tommy's hands left him to deal with his feet as best he could and darted back to

her brother. Her shrill wail, "Oh he's dead—he's dead!" startled them all.

Her cry seemed to bring Castle to life. "No, no—" he exclaimed and the next moment was beside her bending over Hay. "Not dead," he assured her tremulously, "he's fainted. We can bring him round. Don't be afraid—"

The room seemed literally full of Putnam's groans and Cecily's stifled sobbing, with Daly crying at intervals, "Get a light can't some of you!" He himself dared not leave Putnam, who was struggling and raving in a frenzy of rage and fear and pain.

Tommy at last succeeded in untying his feet and had perhaps the happiest inspiration of his life. Pushing past Daly and Putnam he stooped over Sefton and began feeling in his pockets.

Daly mistook his purpose—quite possibly in the confusion he did not realise which of the dark moving objects in the crowded room was Castle and which was Tommy.

"It's no good fussing with him, he's dead," he cried irritably, "for God's sake get a light and see to Putnam. I don't know how badly he's hurt."

"Let me get at him, just wait till I get at the little beast," Putnam reiterated in dull, monotonous fury.

"He's certainly dead," said Tommy, and had the supreme satisfaction of transferring a pistol from Sefton's pocket to his own.

"He wants air," Castle was saying, "I'm afraid he may just go out if we don't get him round."

"Can't we lift him into the passage?" Tommy suggested. "It's like hell in here."

He was suddenly aware of the atmosphere, and felt choking—sick—and unable to breathe.

"No, open the door," said Castle, "this door, the front door, all the doors in the house."

Tommy ran to do his bidding.

The front door let in a breath of fresh air off the sea. Tommy gulped and staggered when he felt it and ran down for a moment onto the wet shingle. He wanted to cry as he felt the cool, soft touch of the moisture-laden breeze. Suddenly he was weak and dizzy with relief.

Then he hurried through the house, throwing open every door and smashing the windows that would not open wide enough to please him, letting in the salt night air, the gentle, drifting drizzle of rain and the noise of the sea.

He found a lamp burning dimly on the table in the room upstairs, turned it up and carried it down. No wonder the air had seemed unbreathable; as he brought in the light he saw that the little room was full of dust and smoke.

"We must carry him out," he said to Castle. "Nothing can live in here. Don't let him come to in this amateur hell."

Putnam was sitting up now, half supported by Daly, his face was cut with the broken glass and covered with smears of blood and half his hair was singed off.

"I'll finish the little brute," he muttered, "if he's not dead already."

"He's not dead," Castle announced, in a high-pitched voice, "but I'll kill you if you come any nearer."

Hay opened his eyes. It was Castle's face he saw first. "Castle," he whispered anxiously, "you'll not leave me?"

"Oh, my child!" Castle exclaimed in a breaking voice. Then raising his head he spoke sharply to Putnam and Daly. "You two can go. Clear. I'll not interfere with you. You know what our arrangements were. Well—I'll not stop your going. Or give you away after."

"You fool—" growled Putnam, "you fool; he knows enough to hang us all."

"You get a start," said Castle. "Go. Make the most of it."

Hay's eyes had shut, his head lay confidently against Castle's arm.

"And what about you?" Daly asked.

"I stay," Castle replied.

"Yes," Putnam shouted suddenly, "you stay, you do, and save yourself by telling on all of us. I'll not leave anyone alive who can tell on me."

He broke from Daly and sprang at Castle. It was Tommy who fired with Sefton's pistol at point blank range; and then suddenly losing patience he turned to Daly, "Clear out or I'll shoot you too. Clear out. Get away. Go to hell."

"Castle—" said Daly hesitatingly, "Castle—"

"You brute," cried Tommy in a fury, "I'd far sooner shoot you than look at you."

He did not know himself. He had not realised that it was possible to feel or talk like that.

Daly looked at Castle, who nodded towards the door. "Go," he said, and Daly went.

"Go to hell and stay there!" Tommy shouted after him.

The next moment he was suddenly himself again, diffident and confused.

"But I say—you?" he faltered. "I understood—may have been mistaken—generally am—you all had reasons for clearing out. You and the rest. Well—look here—you've—so to speak, I mean—saved our lives—sort of. Don't let us keep you if you think you ought to be making off."

"Don't ask me to leave him," Castle answered vehemently. "Don't ask me to leave him. He's the only thing I have loved since—God knows when."

His emotions, like Putnam's, had been released in a flood by Sefton's death. The removal of a restraining fear left him free to give them rein and to indulge them to the full. Tommy was dismayed, almost shocked, by the passion of his utterance.

"Of course," he said, "we're most awfully glad to have you here and all that—"

Hay moved, then moaned and whispered: "Castle—good old Castle."

At his voice Cecily roused herself. She rose a little stiffly from the floor and stretched; then looked at Putnam and Sefton with marked distaste.

"Let's take these away"; she suggested, "they don't look very—gay."

Tommy smiled appreciatively. That last word was surely her brother's. Undoubtedly she had qualities.

"Don't move," she said to Castle, who seemed about to rise, with a confused idea that one could not allow a young lady to handle a corpse. "You will disturb him if you do."

So she and Tommy carried first Sefton and then Putnam across the passage into the little room opposite, and laid them on the floor side by side. Tommy had a worried feeling that one ought to cover them up—that one always did—that any lady would expect it of one.

"I think there are blankets and sheets and things upstairs," he suggested doubtfully.

"Do you think there is food?" Cecily asked, "I am perishing."

"I am sure there is," he answered eagerly, "stacks of it. So am I, now you mention it. Perishing I mean—like you."

She went out first. He turned back and shut the door, and locked it, not reflecting that there was really no danger of their coming out, then found that she had not gone on, but stood confronting him in the passage.

"Did you tell them what Ben thinks you did?" she asked.

Tommy blushed and hesitated, as he often did at a sudden question. She did not see him blush as there was no light in the passage, but was aware of his confusion.

"We can't all be like him," she went on quickly. "I don't blame you if you have. I have no right to blame you—after all, it was all nothing to you."

"No—not really," Tommy stammered eagerly. "I really didn't. You see—they never asked me."

"I thought not," came the slow, thoughtful answer. Tommy wished he could see her face.

"But I say—" he explained, anxious not to take credit that was not his due. "I might have. I expect so. Very likely. I mean, I'm nearly sure I would if they had treated me as they did him."

"Oh I daresay," she answered, "but not, I think, have denied it when he accused you."

"No," Tommy agreed, relieved and strangely pleased and thankful at her perception, "no—I'd not have done that."

"We have treated you very badly," she said. "Ben is hard—very hard on himself and others," she added and went before him into the room.

Tommy shuddered. The sight of it depressed and sickened him. It was a horrible place. Its walls had seen and heard too much. To-night, and last night, and the story Hay had whispered to him in the dark. And the mad fisherman who murdered his wife and children.

"Can't we take him out onto the shore?" he asked. "It's ghastly in here now."

"I think he has had quite enough shaking up," said Castle importantly. "Besides it's raining and we don't want him to catch a chill. It's not stuffy in here now that all the doors are open."

To Tommy the air was thick and reeking with pain and hate and fear—an atmosphere the cool sea breeze from the passage could not dissipate.

"And didn't you say you knew where they kept the food?" Cecily urged him. "Or rather mightn't we all start with a drink? I know I want one, and you two both

look as if you did. Ben has had several of course, but I daresay another wouldn't hurt him—and I believe he'd like some hot milk or coffee or soup—"

Tommy delighted to be busy and useful, handed round drinks and then went upstairs to see what food he could find.

Cecily stooped over her brother, "There's one thing I want to tell you," she said. "Wood didn't really tell them anything. You were beastly rude. We—owe him another apology."

"That's quite true," said Castle, "you see that patch in the ceiling where the plaster is coming away? There's a hole in the floor just above. We could plug it up if we didn't want you to hear us, but if it's open everything sounds as if it was spoken in the same room. Putnam was there all the time and heard all you said. We left you both in here together on purpose. Already we knew the route your uncle had followed, but not in the least where he began to suspect us, or where he hid the emeralds. Only that he had them when he started, and not when he landed in England. What you said about its being a place where Sefton had his friends he could telegraph to and that it was a lonely sort of place gave us the district and told Sefton which map to produce."

Hay looked up at Tommy, who just at that moment was coming in with supplies, then at Cecily. He felt too tired to speak.

"We seem fated to misjudge you," said Cecily, "and to treat you badly, when you have done so much and risked everything for us."

Tommy beamed and glowed. It was quite true, he had run a serious risk in seeking to help them. He had not thought of it that way himself. How delightful it must be to have someone like Cecily—a sister, a wife, a daughter, an aunt—who knew what one meant and expressed it so charmingly. Really she was thrown away on Hay, who except when speechless with pain or exhaustion might surely be trusted to find words to speak his mind for himself. Hang that fellow Carter! He was more trouble than he was worth.

Hay smiled in confirmation of his sister's words, and then looked puzzled.

"What has happened?" he asked.

Castle hesitated. The subject seemed a little large. But to Tommy every story was a simple story.

"Well, you saw Castle shoot Sefton," he said, "and Putnam go off bang. I think you fainted then, when Putnam started bullying you. So Cecily biffed him on the head with the lamp and that set his clothes on fire. So Daly put him out. Then I got Sefton's pistol and opened all the doors, because the air was rank poison. Then Putnam went for Castle, but I shot him with Sefton's pistol. (You were just coming round then, but I daresay you didn't notice much.) Then we told Daly to go away and he went and we put Putnam and Sefton in the cupboard across the way. I think that's about all, isn't it, Castle?"

"And now?" Hay asked anxiously.

"Oh, now, we are all right, because there's no one here but Cecily and you and me and Castle. Sefton's dead and Putnam's dead, and Daly's gone."

"Gone—gone?" Hay repeated in a troubled voice, looking at Castle.

"Did you want him?" Tommy asked anxiously; but Hay still stared, uncertain and questioning, into Castle's face.

"I've been too much in with them," Castle explained stiffly, "not to let him go provided he didn't try to hurt any of us."

"But Castle—Castle," Hay faltered. "Castle—"

"Castle's here," said Tommy, not perceiving his drift and thinking his mind was beginning to wander.

"Here—why?"

Castle understood. "I'll not leave you," he answered warmly. "Don't ask me to leave you."

"But Castle—I'm all right now—safe—with friends."

"I'll not leave you," Castle repeated obstinately and added with a touch of self-importance, "not till I can hand you over to a fully qualified medical practitioner."

Hay laughed weakly. "Cecily," he whispered, "talk to him."

Cecily laid her hand on her brother's and spoke for him.

"I don't know much about it," she said, "but Ben wants you to escape if you can. I suppose in the morning we shall climb the cliff and try to attract attention from the shore. If there's any way you can escape—"

"I'll stay here," Castle insisted, "stay until you are all safe and can get a doctor."

"But we are safe now," Cecily replied, "and I don't think Ben will need anything urgently more than we can do for him. Of course we will get him a doctor as

quickly as we can in the morning, but he'll be all right till then. He's worn out, that's all.

"And don't you see, when a doctor comes—when anyone comes—they will find those two across the passage, and we shall have to explain that. It will be too late to try to go away then. But we should hate—we should all hate, Ben especially—you to get into trouble on our account. That's what you mean, isn't it, Ben?"

"I can't go," Castle persisted, "Daly has gone in the boat. And if I could, I'd not leave him." His voice grew shaky with emotion. "You don't understand, none of you understand in the least. I'll not leave him. If I have saved his life he has saved my—"

"My soul" he had intended to say, but suddenly feared that Hay would mock at him and call him an old humbug, as he had before when he spoke of God.

"Saved—" he repeated, "saved my—my—"

"Your what?" came Hay's low, cool voice, just as Castle had feared.

"Saved me the deuce of a lot of trouble," he concluded, meaninglessly, in lame confusion.

"I know," Tommy suddenly exclaimed. "Brain wave. Why can't we stick Sefton and Putnam where—where"—it seemed horribly crude to say "where you intended to put Hay," and so he compromised with—"well, put them somewhere you know where they won't be awfully easy to find, and all buzz ashore together as soon as we can, then let Castle clear off and go wherever he likes before any of us say anything."

"Don't worry about me," said Castle, "now Sefton's

dead there's no need. I'll not say more or what my plan is, but I have one, so don't you worry."

The night passed slowly. Hay slept under the influence of drugs given him by Castle.

"If he had told," Castle whispered to Tommy, "we'd have given him something stronger—an overdose. It seemed the kindest way. Sefton promised me I should. You heard him ask for something to stop the pain and Sefton say he must tell first. Well—he'd have had it."

"Good Lord, Castle," Tommy exclaimed, "how did you get in with that crowd?"

It was as if a door had shut.

"That's my affair," said Castle frigidly.

"It's very lucky for us you did," said Cecily with her charming smile that was so like her brother's. Castle looked at her and sudden light broke over his features. "Yes—I suppose it is," he said, "I never thought of that." He looked past her with wide-eyed amazement, like a man seeing a vision. "Life's queer," he muttered to himself.

"Dashed queer," he said, looking down at Hay, sleeping peacefully and safe.

"There's still a lot I don't understand," said Tommy. "Why, if you knew so much, didn't you tell him so at once instead of—all that?"

Castle shook his head. "That was Sefton's idea. After all it's a very different thing to know the district more or less and the exact hiding place of a small thing. As things stood we depended on finding and following Carter—and on not losing sight of him for a moment—it might have been simply anywhere in a large area.

Then he might have got suspicious—have hidden it somewhere else or sent it on by another hand or even have kept away from it all together. But if Hay told us the place we were independent."

"Then actually," said Tommy, "Hay was quite mistaken in thinking his telling more would endanger Carter. I mean, you say Carter was practically dished already."

"I don't know," said Castle thoughtfully. "Once Sefton knew which map to look on Carter had a poorish chance, unless he could be warned. Still, he might have taken fright on his own and it's a large district to watch. Probably either way he'd just have gone off into the blue and never come back or been heard of again, but telling the exact spot would have made it a certainty.

"It was Sefton's idea, the whole thing. He said with so little time at our disposal the only way was to get Hay tired and confused and then spring something on him. Some big shock. Something that introduced some quite new element. It nearly succeeded, the sudden offer of your life and his sister's when he had had the shock of knowing Carter was in danger already. I thought he was going to tell, didn't you?"

"Yes," Cecily agreed, "I thought he would, but he couldn't trust himself to decide." She laughed a little sad laugh. "He always said one shouldn't alter an important decision when one had a headache. You noticed that his instinct was to ask for time. But when you mentioned Carter, that told him—so he thought—how the information had been given. That made him feel he had

betrayed him—" she glanced pityingly, affectionately, at the sleeper— "as indeed he had in a way."

"I see," said Tommy, "and he felt so sick with himself and with me that it sort of pulled him together. Yes—I can imagine that it might."

"And how did you know so quickly that I wasn't Dawson?" he asked presently.

Castle hesitated, then said, "I see no harm in answering that. Dawson was to have telegraphed to Sefton two or three times on the journey back. He didn't, so Sefton sent us word to look out—also that he himself was coming, starting the day after you did. I couldn't understand why, if you were Dawson, you hadn't wired, as he had arranged. When you obviously didn't know what to make of the code we used, that settled it for me."

"And there was Hay flatly refusing to believe in me either," said Tommy in an injured tone.

Cecily was looking at her brother, finding him terribly changed. "I wonder," she said slowly, "whether he'll ever be quite the same again."

Castle took fire at that, as at an insult.

"Of course he will!" he exclaimed sharply. "He may want careful nursing for a bit, and an easy time after that, but of course he'll get over it and be the same again. He's young, and strong, and healthy. Of course he will!"

But Tommy thought, "I'm sure he won't. I'm sure none of us ever shall again," only it seemed a miserably gloomy sort of thing to say.

Hay was the only one who slept that night. Tommy

produced food at intervals—tea, coffee, bovril, fried bacon, cocoa, toast, sardines, cheese, boiled eggs and sausages. Castle sat by his patient, brooding over him with a rapt, satisfied expression, and Cecily, very white and rather shaky now that the excitement was over and the way clear, sometimes helped Tommy, sometimes sat by Hay.

Once she and Tommy went down onto the shore and watched the long, dim breakers coming in. It was very dark, only the white lines of foam were distinguishable.

"I can't thank you," she said, "I should cry if I tried."

"I came to help you," Tommy answered, "but really I've done nothing except perhaps hurry things a bit. Castle's right. Life's dashed queer. It all worked out from its own inside; Sefton pushing Castle too far, as he was bound to in the end, he being him."

"Till Putnam was dead we weren't out of danger," she answered.

"Well, Castle would have killed Putnam if I hadn't. It was all bound to happen. Me rolling in made it happen to-night. I mean to say, I only bucked things up a bit."

"Thank God it's finished," said Cecily fervently, turning her face towards the coolness of the softly drifting rain.

"But I say," he asked her, "how did they get you?"

"Daly fetched me," she answered simply. "He told me Ben was ill and gave me messages that sounded quite plausible. I had no reason to doubt him. I went with him. And then he told me more, and threatened

that if I did not do all they wanted it would be the worse for Ben. Of course I wanted to see him—to get to him, in case I could somehow help.

"I knew they had got him, for they told me things he had said—things they could not have invented, they were so like him."

She laughed sadly.

"There aren't many people like him," Tommy said.

"No," she agreed. "If there were the world would be"—she hesitated for an adjective—"the world would be a very lively place."

"And then," Tommy pursued, "then you got hold of me."

"Yes. Thank goodness, I got hold of you. That was Daly's fault. If he'd kept me indoors as I suppose he should, I'd never have seen you. But he was a little vain, I think, of his complete hold over me. I was so frightened I did all he said—because of Ben. So when I said I simply must buy some stockings (it was quite true, they had all gone into holes at once, the way they do), he took me out to get some. I daresay he wanted to test me, feeling sure he'd see if I tried to break my promise."

"You had promised then?"

"Oh yes—promised and sworn—anything—to save Ben," she confessed, then smiled and added, "Wouldn't you?"

"Yes," Tommy agreed solemnly, "I most certainly would. And so would he—only they wouldn't believe him."

"Daly didn't believe me either, but thought he could

hold me by threats. It was wonderful luck catching you as I did."

"Luck for me," said Tommy. "People like me don't meet people like you every day."

She asked him then, and he told her all his share in the matter, from the time she spoke to him in the train until she had found him with her brother in the little dark room they had left. She was crying before he finished.

"It's over," she said, "he's safe, and it's all over."

"You know," Tommy assured her warmly, "I like your brother most awfully."

She laughed strangely. "I hope you can afford it," she said, "he's rather expensive to like much. Not in money, I mean—but rather—strenuous. He expects a great deal."

"And Carter," said Tommy shyly, "I say—are you really going to marry him?"

"That's the idea," Cecily answered, and went back into the cottage.

"Good Lord," thought Tommy, "how in the world does one set about finding out whether a girl is really fond of a fellow or not?"

Then he laughed to himself rather bitterly. "No use. Hay'd never let her chuck him. He'd say she'd given her word and one must keep a contract. Hang it all, he'd never need to say it—he'd see to it she never got the idea. Drat him—he's so confusedly old-fashioned he ought to be kept in a museum.

"And blast it all," he reflected further, "I'd never

dream of asking her for fear of what her brother would think of me if I did.

"Good Lord, of all the silly situations! Fancy liking a fellow so much that one couldn't propose to his sister for fear he wouldn't approve."

He laughed again, but this time quite pleasantly. Hay was his friend—that was safe and certain. No Carter stood in the way.

He followed Cecily into the house.

## CHAPTER XVII

### IN THE MORNING

At last the morning came. Long before any change was visible in the room, Tommy looked up at the window, and, through cold, grey drizzle, saw the cliff.

"God bless us all!" he cried, "it's to-morrow morning."

"Hush!" whispered Castle, with a frown.

"And I say," Tommy continued, discreetly lowering his voice, "I hope Daly isn't wiring directions to Sefton's friends to destroy Carter. I mean to say, it would be rather a sell if after all that it ended with Carter murdered and you without your emeralds."

"It's all right," said Castle. "He can't telegraph for hours yet, there's no office open. And I don't think he'll dare at all. It will take him all his time to get away. You see he can guess that someone will be after him first thing this morning. He'll have to clear quick and lie low, for Hay knows a lot about our hiding places and ways of communication."

"We can cable a warning to Carter or police out there or someone as soon as we get ashore," Tommy suggested.

Cecily put her hand to her hair. "I wonder if I look

at all like you," she said. She was pale, her shingled hair half out of curl, her black eyes dark-rimmed with fatigue, and her black dress creased and dusty. "I think I'll go out for a dip in the sea," she went on, "and then powder my nose. Don't either of you stroll out before I come back."

"That seems to indicate a wash and brush up before breakfast," said Tommy, and began to heat water on the spirit-stove.

When Cecily came back the change in both was remarkable and Tommy had breakfast ready. The dawn was growing but still the lamp gave more light than the window. Hay was still asleep and showed no signs of waking.

"I'm going up the cliff," Tommy announced, "to flag-wag distress to the neighbouring lands and oceans. Is anyone coming with me?"

Castle looked at Hay, and shook his head, and Cecily said: "It's odd you know, but I believe I'm going to sleep. I feel extraordinarily tired for I didn't sleep much in the train."

"You will find plenty of beds upstairs," Castle assured her, "and he will be all right with me."

"I am sure he will," said Cecily, so warmly that Castle reddened with pleasure.

Tommy enjoyed the scramble up the cliff in the cool dawn, with the fresh, moist wind blowing pleasantly from the sea. The night of horror rolled like a black cloud off his spirits. Morning and fresh air, and a stiff climb, that was the present, and it was enough to make him as happy as a lark.

The night was past, and with it its horrible dream. Only when he paused to take breath, he was conscious of something less than an ache—a slight hotness, weariness or tightness in his temples and behind his eyes—the physical outcome of a sleepless night and a whole series of violent emotions.

There was no sunrise. The grey dawn spread slowly over the sea and sky and showed the sullen hills of the mainland shrouded with mist. When Tommy reached the top he saw an empty sea and a lifeless coast. It seemed a hopeless thing to endeavour to attract the attention of anything but gulls.

"Good Lord," he thought, "we're here for life." He was not worried. It would have taken far more than that to worry him at the moment. He wandered about looking in every direction, sure that something would turn up.

Then suddenly he stooped down with a cry of delight. Just by his foot there grew a little weed, three inches high and rigidly upright with stems as hard and slender as the finest wire and tiny yellow flowers held up bravely to the sky.

The combination of extreme frailty and unyielding defiance touched him oddly, and quite inconsequently recalled to him some aspects of his new friend.

"Rotten!" he said, "you're the pluckiest little thing out. Good Lord, if it weren't for you we'd none of us be here."

He tried to gather it, but the threadlike, seemingly delicate stem was so tough that he had to uproot the whole tiny plant. He put it carefully in his buttonhole.

And then from the Glenerris side he saw fishing-boats putting out.

It was some time before he could attract attention, still longer before he could be certain help was coming. Altogether he had been away about three hours before he returned flushed and cheerful to the little room where Castle still sat, looking very old and weary in the morning light.

"I've been seen," he said gaily, "and a boat is coming from Glenerris."

"Hush," said Castle, "he is not sleeping so heavily now. You will wake him. I'll come outside, and you can tell me about it."

Tommy had nothing to tell but what he had told already. He repeated it gaily in the passage, and added, "I came back to tell you in case your plans, whatever they are, include not being seen about when they land."

"It was good of you," said Castle wearily, "but no—no—it doesn't matter. Not in the least. Only they will land on the wrong side of the island. I'll go and signal to them to come through the channel this way."

"I'll go," said Tommy, "it's a steepish climb. But I think they'll have landed before either of us can get to the top."

"No," Castle persisted gently, "you stay here. I know an easier way up. You stay with him. I want a little air. And he will soon be awake if I am not mistaken." He opened the door and stood looking back into the room at Hay, who stirred and moaned in his sleep.

"Dreaming—" Castle murmured. "He'll soon wake."

Tommy was astonished. He had not realised how old

or how ill Castle looked. Surely one night could not have done all that.

"Life's queer," Castle sighed, and walked towards the open door. Tommy saw him standing watching the strong, sullen breakers, and then suddenly above the noise of the sea he heard the wailing cry of a sea bird. He could not have said why, when he had heard so many, that particular scream should have startled him and caught his attention. Then it was repeated—again—again—and he knew that there was something wrong with it. It was not the cry of a gull at all.

He joined Castle quickly outside the cottage.

"What was that?" he asked.

"Oh, just a gull," Castle answered, a little too readily.

"No, it wasn't," said Tommy, "I'm sure it wasn't. Listen—there's a real one calling now, it's quite different. At least—not *quite*—but somehow—"

"I've noticed that," said Castle, "they don't always call the same way. Wonder if I can do it." He gave a loud cry, very like the scream of a gull, muttered, "Not quite right," and repeated it.

Then Tommy knew it was a signal, and blushed at his own stupidity, for had not Castle said that he had arranged his own escape, had he not shown a marked eagerness to leave the cottage alone?

It was decent of him not to have told them his plans. Later, when questions were asked, the knowledge might have been embarrassing.

"I'll go back to Hay," he said.

"Yes—you had better—" Castle sighed. "Don't let him wake alone."

"I must go," he muttered to himself. "Life's dashed queer."

He walked out along the sand and Tommy went back into the cottage.

In the passage suddenly he wished that he had said more—had thanked Castle or shaken hands with him or wished him luck. Then he heard the call again, and went into the room and shut the door, without waiting to hear whether it was repeated or answered.

"What an owlish bear I am," he thought, "he's been most awfully decent. Hay wouldn't have let him go like that without a word—or Cecily."

A few minutes later Hay woke, trembling and in a panic.

"What's happened? Castle—where is Castle?" he asked shuddering and looking about him.

"He's just gone out to show the boat where to land," Tommy explained.

"To show the boat—" Hay repeated in a dazed sort of way—"the boat—where to land?"

"Yes, and then, you know, he means to escape before they come. That's why I keep out of the way.

"You see, I've been up the cliff all the morning and managed to attract attention. Like a castaway in a book, you know, waving my shirt. Only it wasn't my shirt, it was—"

Suddenly Hay clutched his arm, a look of terror on his face.

"What was that?" he asked.

"What was what?" said Tommy.

"You didn't hear?"

"No—what?"

"I heard a shot." Hay was trembling all over.

"I didn't hear it," Tommy protested, "you must have imagined it."

"No—no—" with sudden agony Hay remembered his own helplessness. "I can't move— Oh, God!—go—go quick!"

"But where?" Tommy asked. "Where do you think it was? In the house? Outside? Where?"

"I don't know where—not anywhere—I just *heard* it. *Heard* it, that's all. I don't know where—but I heard it." He was growing hysterical between anxiety and helplessness.

Tommy had no doubt the sound had been imaginary, and yet Hay's terror was infectious. He did not like to leave him, but yet did not see how else to quiet him.

Fortunately at the moment Cecily came in. "What is it?" she asked quickly, seeing the distress on her brother's face.

"A shot! Didn't you hear? I heard a shot!" he answered.

Cecily caught her breath with a gasp. "Oh, Ben! Where is Castle?"

"He went out to signal to a boat," said Tommy, trying to indicate by strange contortions of his eyebrows that the shot was an imaginary one. His meaning apparently missed her. Her face was white and horrified.

"Don't you remember?" she whispered. " 'I won't

leave anyone alive who can tell on me.' If he just hid the boat and waited among the rocks till Castle passed—"

"But it was *Putnam* said that," Tommy protested, struggling against the invasion of fear from all round him, "and Putnam's dead."

"Go—" Hay urged him, "for God's sake go and see!"

Tommy hesitated. "If it's that—if Daly felt that way too—if he's shot Castle—he'll come back for you. How can I leave you? It's not safe. I didn't hear any shot. I don't know which way to go. He may be anywhere."

"For God's sake, Cecily, go if he won't," cried Hay wildly, and burst into tears of rage at his own helplessness.

Cecily made no movement, but looked at Tommy.

"Go," she said almost inaudibly.

Tommy took Sefton's pistol from his pocket, and handed it to her.

"In case I go the wrong way, and he comes here," he said.

She shook her head. "You may need it. I'll lock the door."

"Don't cry," she said when Tommy had gone. "It does no good."

"Oh, Cecily," Hay moaned in misery, "suppose he shot Castle—now he'll just shoot Wood, too—"

"Don't be silly," she scolded gently, "we can't help it. But we shall soon know if he has, because he will come here and shoot us. There's no key."

She went out into the passage, and found that the key of the front door was missing, as well, and that

those of the other rooms did not fit. Then she remembered Putnam, and thought perhaps, like Sefton and Castle, he carried a pistol in his pocket.

"What are you doing, Cecily? Where are you going?" her brother called to her.

"Just looking for something," she answered from across the passage, then stooped down quickly, and with firm determined hands searched Putnam's body, feeling in all his pockets.

It was the key she found. Perhaps he was not trusted with firearms.

She went back, locked the door, and stood waiting beside it. Hay had stopped crying, and was listening with strained expectancy.

Neither spoke. Even when they heard footsteps outside they were still silent, for Cecily gave a little quivering start, and her brother turned his head that way. Each knew the other had heard, and they had not the social habit of commenting on the obvious.

Quick steps, coming that way.

Then Tommy spoke outside in a subdued, shaken voice, "I say, let me in."

He was breathless and pale. "You were right. There was a shot. You couldn't have heard it though. Not Daly. Himself."

"Himself!" cried Cecily.

"I knew it!" Hay exclaimed, "I knew it!"

There was a moment's pause, then Tommy went on. "Through the head. Among the boulders with the sea breaking a foot or two away. And down wind. You couldn't have heard it."

Again they were silent, and then Hay spoke calmly enough, "It was the best thing he could do. The only thing. The only thing for him—but—" Tommy thought he was going to break down again, but he mastered his emotion and finished in a hard, constrained voice, "Yes —he was quite right."

"He saved all our lives," said Tommy, reverently.

"He did right," Hay repeated on a tone of annoyance, as though he had been contradicted, or as though their lives were an irrelevance that should not have been dragged in. "He saved himself."

"I wonder how he got in with this lot," Tommy reflected, "he seemed a decent sort of cove."

Hay shook his head, "I don't know, but I'll tell you my guess. Upper middle class, and passionately respectable. Decent child of decent parents. And all that. Oh, but more—a real passion for respectability. Kind of thing we can't understand or imagine, you know, any more than we can religious ecstasy.

"And then—somehow— Probably a crime of passion. Passion of another sort. Killed a woman perhaps —or a rival. Sort of thing no jury would really be very hard on—cruelly provoked. But—it's difficult to realise in that sort of person the horror of having one's name in the paper—being mixed up in things that can't be discussed in suburban drawing-rooms.

"All that might tend to excuse it to you or me—intense feeling—almost temporary insanity—hideous provocation—something strange—outré—exceptional in the circumstances would make it to Castle—the normal, respectable Castle—more utterly unspeakable.

"Who knows? Perhaps a married woman—perhaps a woman of the streets. Certainly—almost certainly—a bad lot. And that—all that in the paper—talked about, gloated over, commented on. His name, his photograph—his children disgraced.

"He feared it more than the mediæval monk feared hell. We can't imagine either.

"Then Sefton. Can you see how Sefton would get hold of him—lead him on to other crimes—less excusable—less spontaneous, each new one a fresh hold?

"But at last it was all simple. He found a way. He shot Sefton and he shot himself. No one else probably knows his real name or history. His children (I have a conviction that he leaves somewhere a perfectly good widow and children who have thought him dead for years), even they will read of this and never guess that it was their father. His old parents—the family tombstones. Hang it all, you can imagine the details!

"He has saved his name—kept it out of the papers. Saved his children's names and his parents. That's more to that kind of person than life. It stands for honour—for pride—for salvation—for everything.

"He's done a lot of low-down mean things to keep his name respectable. That was Sefton's threat—exposure. That was the weapon he has held over him. But now at last he has done the best—the right—the only thing he could." Then suddenly he began to cry bitterly, remembering the man himself, his kindness and his affection; and having defended the manner of his death, began to lament his loss. "You asked me how it was I didn't go potty? Well—Castle is the answer to a great

extent. His kindness—his company—what it meant to me. I only realise it now. What a fool I was! I ought to have guessed what he meant when he said he had made arrangements for himself."

"But if you had, what would you have done?" Tommy asked gravely.

"God knows!" Hay answered, laughing unsteadily. Then, being honest, he added, "One could only have let him." He was silent a moment, then said in a tone of sharp annoyance, "Where in hell have you put my handkerchief?" which was utterly unfair, as Tommy had not touched it.

"You talk too much," said Cecily affectionately.

And Tommy thought that after all Castle had died happily. He had saved the thing he loved—won its gratitude, affection and trust. That was the side of the matter that appealed to him. Castle had watched Hay sleeping all night, and had thought himself well paid.

"But Ben," Cecily was saying, "we ought to think what we mean to do. It's important, isn't it, that Daly should be caught before he can send a message to the people out there?"

"Oh, Lord, yes," said Hay, "and we shall have to do some telegraphing too. Have you any money?"

He looked from Cecily, who shook her head, to Tommy who answered, "No—Putnam bagged it."

"Well, I suppose Putnam's got it," Hay retorted, "and you can bag it back. We shall want a lot. It's expensive cabling to South America. Probably Sefton has some on him too—and Castle. And there must be some about the house, somewhere."

Then he turned to Cecily, and they began discussing in low, eager tones what telegrams they must send, how worded, and to what people.

"Listen," said Cecily suddenly, "they've landed on the other side, as Castle said they would, and are calling to know where we are. Let's go out and answer them."

In the doorway Tommy turned, then went back quietly to Hay.

"It's as you said," he reminded him, "you are free, safe—and soon you'll be away from here."

Hay's eyes widened. He shivered and drew a deep breath.

"Yes—" he said, "yes."

And for once words failed him altogether through the intensity of his feeling.

It always seemed to Tommy that the story ended there, in a dizzy exhilaration of relief; there in the passage with Cecily waiting outside in the wind and her brother stunned into silence by the sudden realisation of mere safety and freedom. It frightened him afterwards when he came to think of it that the bare cessation of ill could give such a shock of positive joy.

Security and freedom from danger were not things one thought about in ordinary life. One was far less conscious of them than of light and air and food, but to Hay they were a rapture too intense for words or thoughts—for anything but passive acceptance—so that he lay still in dazed and trembling surrender under the crushing weight of joy.

"I suppose," thought Tommy, "he's just about the

happiest thing on earth at the moment and yet a stranger happening along and seeing him there would pity him, not envy him."

Outside was a blur of wind and sea and rain, and Cecily against it, a sharp, incongruous, graceful silhouette, with her black eyes, her ruffled black hair, her long, tight black sleeves, and short black skirt, blowing above her knees.

"Cecily," said Tommy, "I love you!"

She laughed gaily, unsteadily and shook her head, "I don't blame you, we are all a little drunk."

To which he replied, "It's great!"

Afterwards came the long anti-climax—their meeting with the boatmen and their actual transport to the mainland.

For Tommy the whole descent into the world of commonplace expedients and annoying trivialities was lit by the memory of that flash of blinding, silencing joy; and it amazed him to see how quickly Cecily and her brother lost themselves and their tempers in a mass of troublesome details—answering questions—seeing the doctor —talking to the police and sending cables.

It seemed to him that as long as he lived he would only have to say: "I am alive and safe and comfortable, and no one I am specially keen on is in any particular danger," to be radiantly happy in the most unsatisfying circumstances.

Hay was soon put to bed in the inn—the doctor gave orders he was not to be disturbed, and he slept utterly exhausted. They had answered every question and had sent every telegram they could think of at last.

"What about a stroll?" said Tommy shyly, "are you game?"

They walked down the muddy road together till they got a view of the sea and the islands. Cecily stood staring at him in silence, but Tommy suddenly darted off with a joyful "Hullo." He was back in a few seconds, holding in his hand a pale blue flower—a long stem from the top of which there hung two graceful bells.

He took the already slightly withered plant from his buttonhole, and handed both together to Cecily.

"Cicendia filiformis," he said solemnly, "and Sisyrinchium bermudianum—yellow cissy and blue sissy."

She did not laugh or even smile. Her eyes were grave and bright. "Thanks awfully," she said.

Next moment they were startled by the hoot of a motor.

"Great gooseberries!" cried Tommy, "A car on this road! It must be Moggy!"

They ran to meet it through the mud.

"Tommy! That you?" cried a voice from the car, and Tommy exclaimed:

"Great snakes! My uncle!"

He knew now that ordinary life had begun again, and that his adventure was over. But he carried out of it two wonderful things—the memory of a joy by which all future emotions must be tested and the certain friendship of Ben and Cecily Hay.

THE END